SEPTEMBER 1995 £3
THE TRUTH IS IN HERE...

Adventures in Science Fiction

#4

SF GOES ART-HOUSE: THE CITY OF LOST CHILDREN

SFX

GIRL TROUBLE: HR GIGER TALKS SPECIES

CHRISTOPHER PRIEST IN THE SFX INTERVIEW

SO, WAS BLAKE'S 7 *REALLY* ANY COP?

WATERWORLD: REVIEWED AND RATED. PLUS, THE SCRIPTWRITER SPEAKS!

NOW YOU SEE HIM, NOW YOU DON'T: DAVID MCCALLUM *IS* THE INVISIBLE MAN

The X-Factor

Inside The X-Files with creator Chris Carter

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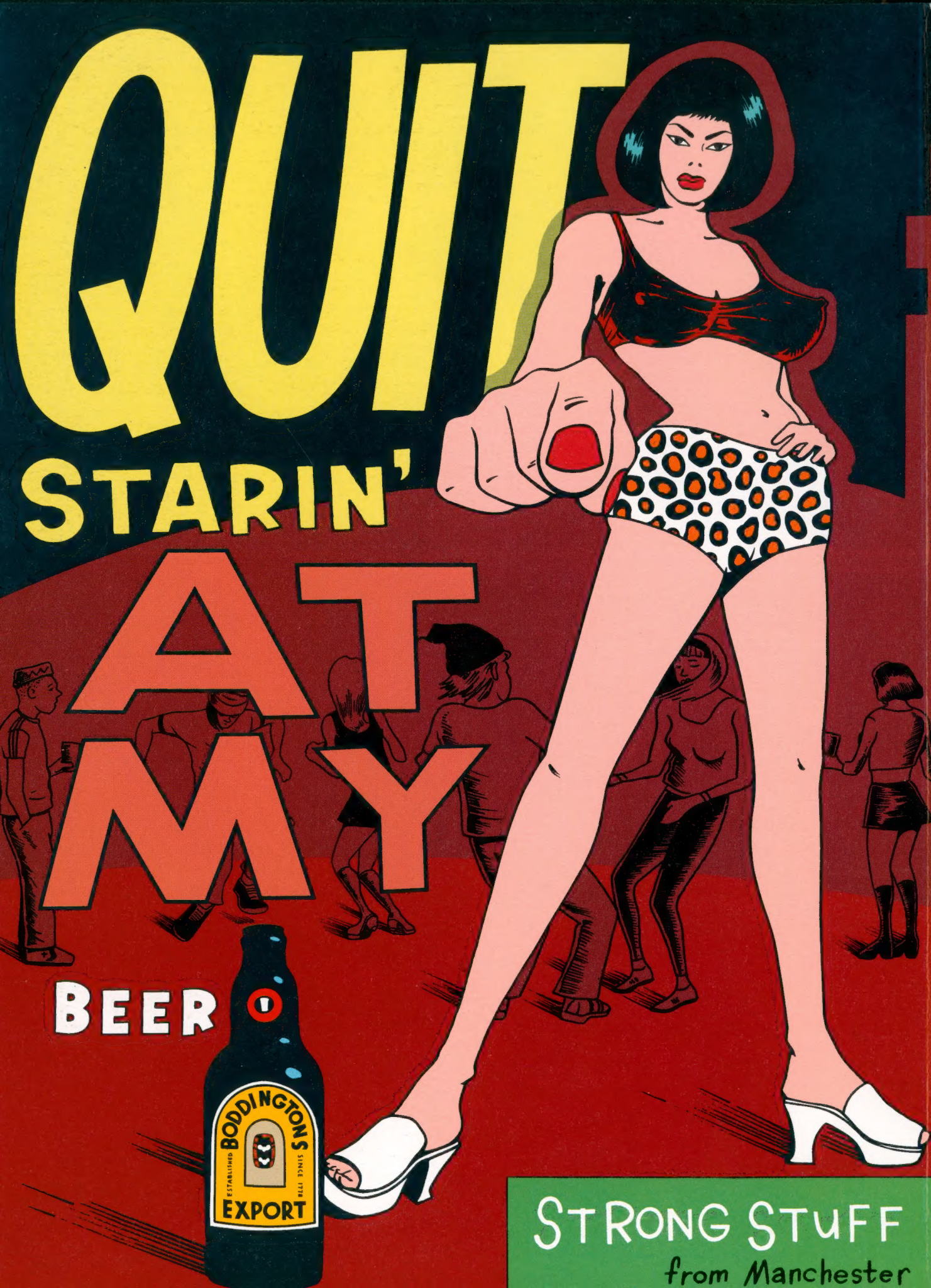
Films, TV, Books, Comics, Video, Models and more...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SFX #4 SEPTEMBER

Adventures in Science Fiction

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The wide, wild world of science fiction, from Spielberg's new computer game to the *Power Rangers*, Marvel Comics to *The Mentors*...

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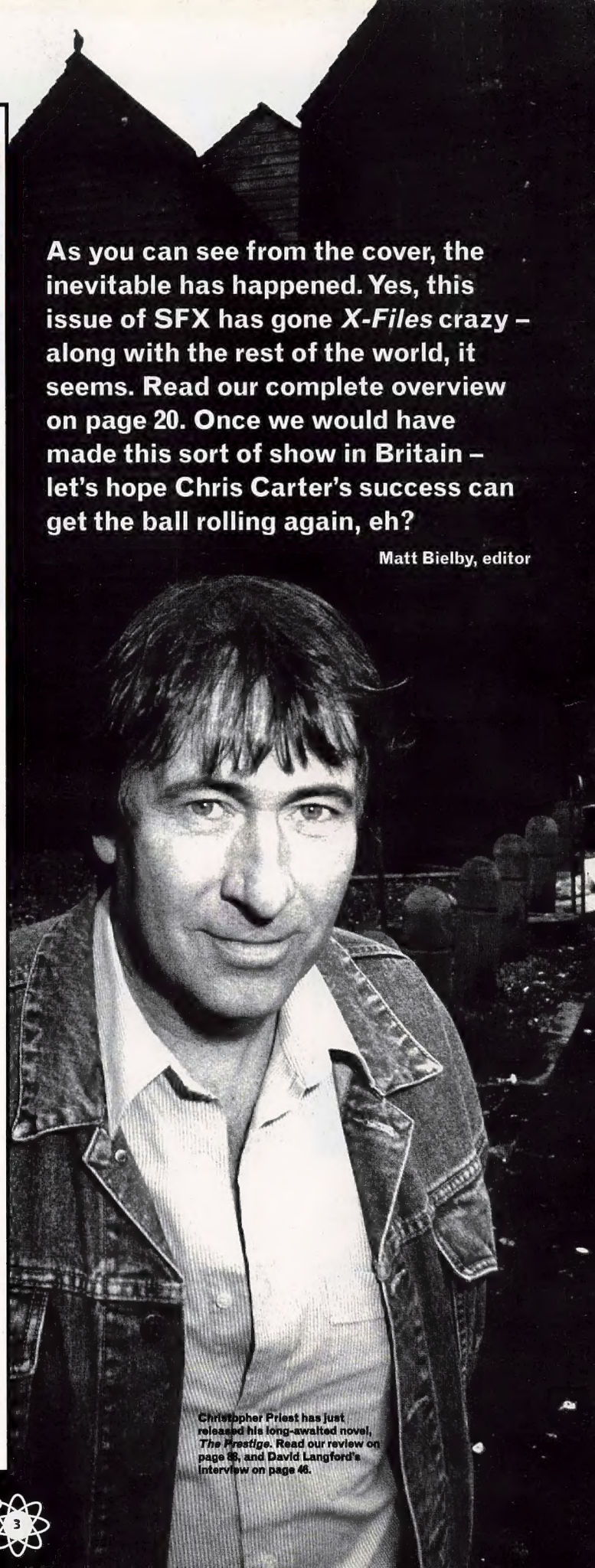
As you can see from the cover, the inevitable has happened. Yes, this issue of SFX has gone *X-Files* crazy – along with the rest of the world, it seems. Read our complete overview on page 20. Once we would have made this sort of show in Britain – let's hope Chris Carter's success can get the ball rolling again, eh?

Matt Bielby, editor



Christopher Priest has just released his long-awaited novel, *The Prestige*. Read our review on page 88, and David Langford's interview on page 46.

Illustration: Rian Hughes

ASTOUNDING STORIES FROM THE MANY WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION, INCLUDING THE LOWDOWN ON SPIELBERG'S THE DIG, FUNNY GOINGS-ON IN STRACZYNSKI'S BABYLON 5, AND MORE PRODUCTION HELL...

This month in Strange Tales...

DIRTY!

Spielberg gets his hands dirty with his first CD-ROM title, *The Dig*, on **page 6.**

SOAKING!

Waterworld writer Peter Rader tells us what he thinks of the final cut on **page 8.**

DESPERATE!

Sales are falling for Marvel Comics' old heroes. What's to be done? See **page 12.**

KICKING!

Ex-Red Ranger Austin St John talks *Power Rangers* and karate. See **page 14.**

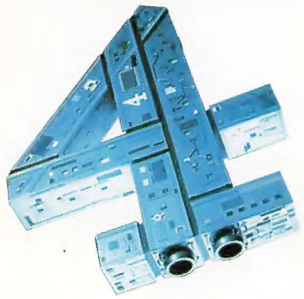
SFX Top Tens

Scottish SF things to celebrate Intersection!

10. **Sean Connery** (Top Bond bloke)
9. **Albacons** (Scottish national conventions)
8. **Nebula Science Fiction** ('50s magazine)
7. **Jamie McCrimmom** *(Doctor Who* companion)
6. **Bob** (Nova-winning fanzine)
5. **Jackie McRobert** (top fan-babe)
4. **The Wicker Man** (spooky horror flick)
3. **Highlander** (films, TV series, cartoon)
2. **Scotty** (Enterprise engineer)
1. **Iain Banks** (SFX's first interviewee!)

"May the Four be with you"

THE CHANNEL 4 SCI-FI WEEKEND, 26-27 AUGUST



Timed to coincide with this year's Worldcon, Intersection, Channel 4 is providing us with a weekend packed with SF programming. It'll be worth staying in for what promises to be one of the hottest weekends of the year, reckons **MJ Simpson**...

If you're not in Glasgow over the last weekend in August, you can still experience the SF wonder that is Worldcon via Channel 4. "Yes, SF fans are a minority," says Stewart Cosgrove, C4's commissioning editor, "but they're a big minority. In the bookshops, science fiction has a bigger section than crime or romance, and Hollywood's obsessed by it."

"I first had the idea about two years ago," says Stewart. "I was aware of Worldcon coming up, and I had been approached by one or two Scottish producers to cover it in some way. I have a mandate to do as much outside of London as possible, and so the Sci-Fi weekend was born."

Officially launched in London on 3 August, C4's weekend is a mixture of films, documentaries and specialist TV, including a 40-minute programme from the convention itself (which runs from Thursday 24 to Monday 28 August), broadcast at 8pm on Saturday.

Stewart admits to being a late-comer to science fiction, having become interested in the field after reading William Gibson and getting into the cyberpunk movement. Prior to that, he was a big fan of soul music, and the two interests coincide in one of the weekend's highlights.

"'The Mothership Connection' is a look at the links between science fiction and black culture, from Nichelle Nicholls in *Star Trek* through to the imagery of George Clinton and the *Brides of Funkenstein*. I'm very excited about it; it's a subject that's not been covered before."

Previous British Worldcons have tended to be ignored, or put down, by the media. Conspiracy (Brighton, 1987) had a small amount of radio coverage, whereas Confiction (The Hague, 1990), was a major event in the Netherlands, received extensive national press coverage, and was even officially opened by the Dutch Minister of Culture.

Although C4's Sci-Fi Weekend isn't perfect, it's nevertheless to be welcomed, and can only increase the media's awareness of SF fans as a viable target audience. One aspect of this is a C4 special planned for November – "The Shooting Gallery: Future Dread", which comprises four hours of SF flicks by first-time film-makers.

Stewart himself is keen to see all aspects of SF covered, not just the oft-mocked "fan-dressing-up" side of things. As he himself admits "I prefer the discussions to the costuming." And good job too, says SFX.

C4's Sci-Fi Weekend: THE HIGHLIGHTS

AMONG THE ILLUSTRIOUS PROGRAMMES WHICH THOSE ATTENDING "THE SCOTTISH CON" WILL BE VIDEO RECORDING ARE:

Craig Charles (right) will be fronting C4's coverage of Worldcon '95.

Faster Than Light

Between ten and 15 "future news" broadcasts from the Science Fiction Channel in the USA. Tomorrow's news today!

Secret History: The Roswell Incident

A documentary on the infamous 1947 "UFO crash," including controversial footage which claims to show an alien autopsy. (Yeah, right.)

Takeover TV Sci-Fi Special

"When another department invited submissions for Takeover TV, about 60% of the videos they received had an SF angle."

Loads of Films

The Man Who Fell to Earth, Earth Versus the Flying Saucers, Outbreak, Soylent Green, I Married a Monster from Outer Space, Welcome II the Terradome, Red Planet Mars...

(Warning! C4's *Metropolis* is the ghastly Giorgio Moroder version. SFX's advice is to watch it with the sound and colour turned down, and your radio tuned to Classic FM.)

"I really didn't understand everything that was going on..."

Strangely, space hero Gareth Thomas isn't talking about the famous last episode of *Blake's 7* – when his crusading hero is revealed to be a villain (or maybe not) – but his return to SF TV in the pilot for a new show, *The Mentors*. **Dave Golder** talked to Thomas about both projects, and mingled with his *Blake's 7* co-stars, at a reunion for the show, 15 years after the final episode aired...

The original Liberator crew, slim and trim. Waistlines were larger at Stringfellows...

If you were confused by the final scenes at the end of the celebrated BBC space opera, *Blake's 7* – when intergalactic Robin Hood Blake finally reappeared after an absence of two seasons, only to get shot by his miffed "merry men" – Blake actor Gareth Thomas' return to science fiction is *really* going to throw you. "I'm playing a completely over-the-top villain," he revealed at a reunion of the original Liberator crew, organised by BBC Video in August to celebrate the re-release of the entire series at budget prices.

Thomas was talking about his role in a new British SF TV show pilot called *The Mentors*, aimed at a family audience, shot this June in Kent, and directed by Michael Hayes, who helmed several impressive Tom Baker *Doctor Who* stories. Other *Who* veterans, including make-up designer Sheelag Wells, costume designer Pat Godfrey and musician Mark Ayres, are also involved.

So what's it all about? Thomas himself isn't exactly sure. "I really didn't understand everything that was going on," he admits, "but then it was only a week's shoot, so we worked at a furious pace. Still, it was great fun. I play a larger-than-life bad guy called Grieg, who represents the dark side of an ancient force that is awakening. It's all about mental powers and stuff like that."

The "stuff like that," by all accounts, includes the suggestion that the mythical sunken city of Atlantis was, in fact, populated by aliens, whose make-up still exists in certain humans today. Hence some of the decidedly odd goings-on depicted in the show. The producers are currently looking for backers to make a series.

Meanwhile, back at the *Blake's 7* bash, and Sally Knyvette – the glamorous Jenna from the show – revealed that she would love to return to the role in a movie version. "It's something [series creator] Terry Nation keeps saying he'd like to do, and he's in Hollywood now, so you never know," says Knyvette. "But I'd like to get the chance to play her like I never got to in the series – as a Ripley-type tough female at the helm of the most powerful ship in the universe. It's a shame that this reunion is just to launch some videos, and not some new material."

That said, even if a movie version was made, there's no guarantee any of the original cast would be involved. While Gareth Thomas readily agreed to the idea of a movie, Paul Darrow – who played Avon – pointed out one obvious problem. The old crew might not fit in their uniforms any more...

For more on Blake's 7, *turn to Couch Potato (page 54), Blueprint (page 58) and the SFX Archive (page 106).*

Character assassination!

WE ASKED THE ORIGINAL BLAKE'S 7 CAST TO SUM UP THEIR CHARACTERS IN JUST ONE, SIMPLE WORD...

Blake (Gareth Thomas) *"Er, I can't say 'stupid,' can I? How about 'dedicated'?"*
Avon (Paul Darrow) *"Trustworthy."*
Villa (Michael Keating) *"Sensible."*
Cally (Jan Chappell) *"That's a stupid question. How would YOU answer that?"*
Jenna (Sally Knyvette) *"Erm, let me think about that.* [Thinks for a bit.] *Oh, I don't know – make something up."*
Gan (David Jackson) *"Dead."*
Zen (Peter Tuddenham) *"Pompous."*
Orac (Peter Tuddenham) *"Fussy."*
Slave (Peter Tuddenham) *"Apologetic."*
Travis (Stephen Grief) *"Vengeful."*

Gareth Thomas goes for his SF hat trick. Before Blake (left) there was *Star Maidens;* now he's in *The Mentors.*

Of the original cast Sally Knyvette (Jenna) is arguably the only one who could still play the same character in a movie version.

Paul Darrow, on the other hand, candidly admits that playing Avon again might be difficult with his current figure.

Objets d'arse

"Glorious" *Star Trek: The Next Generation* tie

What is it?
A tie woven from 100% finest polyester, emblazoned with the image of the USS Enterprise D and the slogan *"Star Trek: The Next Generation."* It's roughly 52" long and 4" across at the widest point. Most of the tie is a subtle star-field, but the main part, behind the Enterprise, is a hideous clash of blues, oranges and pinks. It costs £12.95 from Kathie's Comics of Plymouth, but is doubtless available from other stores too.

Why's it cool?
Er, three reasons. Because it's got the Enterprise on it; it proves you can write *"Star Trek"* on any old piece of tat and sad Trekkies will buy it to clutter up their bedrooms; and, finally, because a loud, science fiction-related tie is a stylish accessory and essential component of any well-to-do fop's wardrobe.

Why's it sad?
It must be admitted that the "spatial anomaly" above the Enterprise looks like a badly aimed dollop of strawberry ice cream. And the bizarre blue and orange background can cause serious retina damage if stared at for too long.

Verdict
As the only person in the SFX office who regularly wears a tie, I loved it. The others all laughed. I don't know why...

MJ Simpson

Spielberg's space odyssey

Spielberg's latest SF epic won't be showing at a cinema near you soon... It is, however, poised to set the CD-ROM world alight this Autumn, writes **Gary Whitta**...

The Dig promises to deliver some spectacular visual effects...

How to get back home? Your three-strong crew ponder their predicament...

Several years ago, Steven Spielberg dreamed up a concept for an episode of his (then) new TV series, *Amazing Stories*. But before it could get into pre-production it was decided the Space Age tale would be too expensive to film, and so the project was scrapped.

Except not quite. Spielberg was determined that his vision would make it to some sort of screen sooner or later, and so passed on the concept to LucasArts, the computer and video games branch of George Lucas' entertainment empire. There the story was developed and adapted for an interactive medium, with Spielberg overseeing every step of the project. Now, five years later, *The Dig* is almost complete and ready for release.

Set in the near future, *The Dig* tells the story of three astronauts who are sent to investigate a mysterious asteroid that has entered Earth orbit. Their simple mission takes an extraordinary turn when the asteroid warps them to a distant planet, where they must uncover the secrets of a dead alien civilisation, and then find their way home again...

> **"Spielberg said he wanted a sort of cross between *Forbidden Planet* and *Treasure of the Sierra Madre.*"**
>
> **Sean Clark, project leader**

"We don't want to do *Pigs in Space*," says *The Dig*'s project leader Sean Clark. "You have to treat this with a certain amount of intelligence and sensibility. One of the big things we're trying to get across here is *drama*... That's done by interaction between the characters and dialogue, but also by carefully managing the plot. One of the things that Spielberg mentioned when we first talked about doing this was a cross between *Forbidden Planet* and *Treasure of the Sierra Madre.*"

Early signs are that *The Dig* remains true to Spielberg's initial concept. It's a CD-ROM extravaganza featuring the voices of Hollywood's finest and making use of the sfx skills of Industrial Light & Magic – the first time Lucasfilm's effects house has worked in an interactive medium.

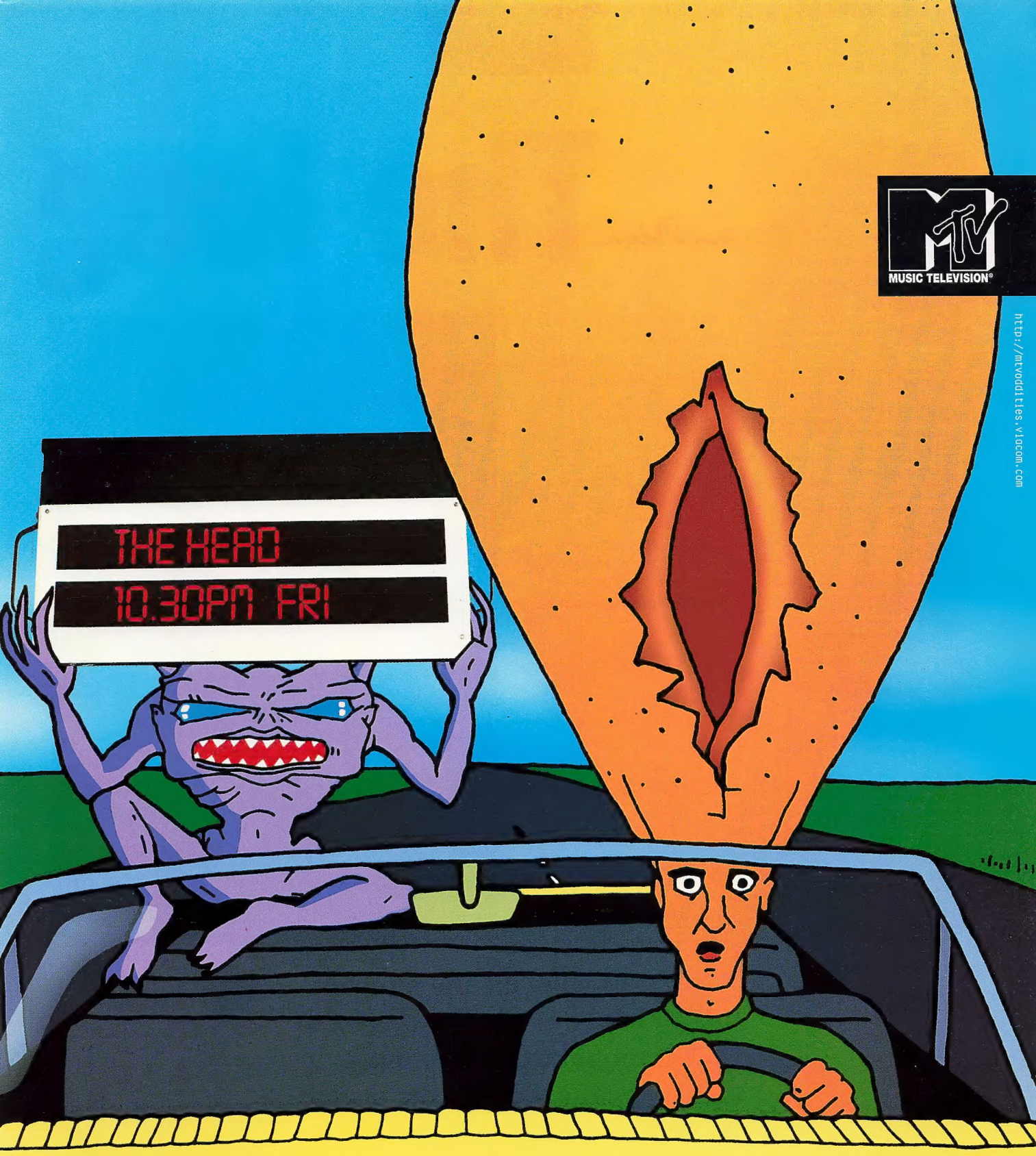
Certainly, if the quality of Spielberg's movies is anything to go by, *The Dig* could be hot stuff indeed.

LucasArts' The Dig *is due out on PC CD-ROM this Autumn.*

FAB!

Ever wondered what all those great Gerry Anderson acronyms actually *meant?* Then wonder no longer...

Acronym	Show	Means	Doesn't mean
M.S.V.	Captain Scarlet	Maximum Security Vehicle	My Sunny Valentine
S.I.G.	Captain Scarlet	Spectrum Is Green	Scarlet Is Gay
S.P.V.	Captain Scarlet	Spectrum Pursuit Vehicle	Sixties Puppet Video
P.W.O.R.	Stingray	Proceeding With Orders Received	Puppets With Obvious Ropes
W.A.S.P.	Stingray	World Aquanaut Security Patrol	White Anglo Saxon Protestant
W.S.P.	Fireball XL5	World Space Patrol	With Strings Prominent
S.H.A.D.O.	UFO	Supreme Headquarters Alien Defence Organisation	Sixties Hairstyles Are Definitely Old-fashioned
S.I.D.	UFO	Space Intruder Detector	Surprisingly Intricate Design
U.F.O.	(Um, UFO)	Unidentified Flying Object	Dodgy '70s heavy metal band
W.I.N.	Joe 90	World Intelligence Network	Widely Impersonated Nerd
B.I.G. R.A.T.	Joe 90	Brain Impulse Galvanascope Record And Transfer	Blatantly Improbable Genuinely Ridiculous Acronym Trouble
B.I.S.H.O.P.	Secret Service	British Intelligence Service Headquarters Operation Priest	Basically It Shouldn't Have Obvious Puppets
F.A.B.	Thunderbirds	Nothing, really (it's short for "Fabulous")	Fund Ar Birds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This *just* in...

Classic monster mystery revealed!

If you buy officially licensed "Universal Studios Monsters" merchandise nowadays, you might be surprised by how little the images actually resemble the monsters from the classic films of the '30s and '40s. The Frankenstein creature doesn't look much like Karloff, neither the Wolf Man or the Mummy could really be identified as Lon Chaney Jr, and whatever that vampire is, it certainly isn't Lugosi. Is Universal just employing crap artists, or what?

Well, no. The inevitable truth is that the identifiable likenesses of Karloff, Chaney and Lugosi are owned by their children, who license the merchandise which bears their parents' images, ensuring quality for the fans who buy it. Universal Studios, for reasons best known to itself, is unwilling to pay for said licences, and so only have the right to use photographic images of the three horror kings from the films. Therefore, any newly drawn representations must not be recognisable as Boris, Lon or Bela.

This means that if your Universal Monsters merchandise is licensed by the film studio, the images will bear only a passing resemblance to the monsters they're supposed to represent. Funny old world....

Sliders and *Earth 2* Skyward

Sliders starts on Sky One, Tuesday 3 October, 8pm, while *Earth 2* kicks off on Wednesday 4 October, again at 8pm – both are two-hour pilots. News of *Sliders'* demise turns out to be happily presumptuous, however – although it was supposedly cancelled, the Fox network has since backtracked and ordered 13 more episodes for 1996.

In the meantime, you can enjoy an interview with horror novelist Stephen King (Wednesday 27 September, 8pm), and two "Making Ofs" – *Secrets of The X-Files* (Tuesday 26 September), and *The Making of Space Precinct* (Friday 29 September).

Finally on Sky, viewers who missed it the first time around can now catch the entire series of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, which is being re-run in October...

Bats is back

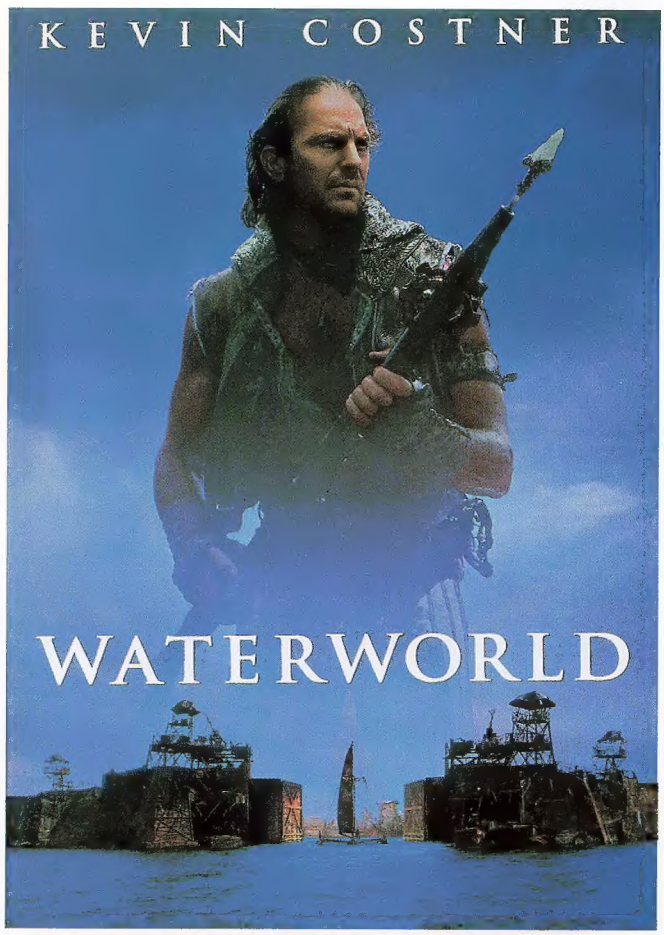
If you've been having trouble following *Batman* around the Channel 4 schedules, now, as of September, you can have trouble following it round the Family Channel schedules instead... From Monday 4 September, the dynamic duo will be bat-tling their worst foes twice daily, at the rather irritating times of 5.50pm and 11.30pm. Also to be shown in September is the TV movie *I Dream Of Jeannie: 15 Years Later*, with Barbara Eden recreating her magical genie role from the popular '60s fantasy sitcom. Wayne Rogers is in the Larry Hagman role.

Dredd on arrival

An adaptation of *Judge Dredd* is doing the rounds which proves that it *is* possible to dramatise the strip without altering the characters and situations beyond all recognition. BBC Radio One FM is currently running a *Judge Dredd* series in 80 three-minute episodes, every weekday, at 4.40pm. Don't worry if you've missed all the episodes so far, as the current storyline – "The Day The Law Died" – finishes on 8 September. Episode 41, on Monday 11 September, kicks off a whole new saga: "The Apocalypse War."

The long

When screenwriter Peter Rader wrote the first draft of the script that turned into *Waterworld,* he was thinking in terms of a "low budget *Mad Max* knock-off." Famously, of course, the film eventually cost up to $200 million, making it far and away the most expensive movie ever filmed. But how much of the original script survived the tortuous journey from paper to screen? **Joe Nazzaro** investigates...



Not waving, but drowning? Somehow, *Waterworld* went from cheapo *Mad Max* rip-off to the most expensive film ever...

"I really like the moment where Enola has this long monologue about how great a warrior the drifter is, and you intercut between her talking and him killing the pirates one by one. That part has a mythic, driving quality to it, like a great Western."

Peter Rader, screenwriter

When screenwriter Peter Rader was asked to come up with an idea for a low-budget *Mad Max* knock-off, he had no idea the result would eventually be *Waterworld*, the most expensive movie ever made.

"A lot of people have asked me how I came up with the concept," says Rader, just a few days after *Waterworld's* American première. "I'd started thinking, what is a way of creating a universe that we've never seen before on film? We've seen a post-Apocalyptic desert, we've seen outer space, we've seen underwater, but we haven't seen a movie that takes place entirely on the surface of the sea. I thought it would be interesting to have a world covered in water, so I pitched this idea: What if we did *Mad Max* set on water, and instead of cars we had these motor boats, wave-runners, motorised

swim...

surfboards, and all kinds of cool, floating cities? They said, 'You're out of your mind, that would cost $5 million!'"

Rader ultimately decided to finish *Waterworld* on spec, but initial response was distinctly unenthusiastic. The script languished on a shelf for three years, until he dusted it off and did another rewrite. Within a week, producer Andy Licht and Jeff Mueller had snapped up the epic, and *Waterworld* began its long swim to the big screen.

According to Rader, the story hasn't changed much over the years, except for a few significant elements. "One is the super-tanker," he remembers, "which is in my script, but wasn't the lair of the Smokers [the film's band of pirates]. They had their own atoll, built above an old oil platform submerged 2-3,000 feet down, but oil is still gurgling up, so they have this slick of oil they can skim for their boats.

That jetski isn't flying – it's *jumping*. Rader never expected amazing stunts like this...

"The way I used the oil tanker was more mythic. After the heroes rescue Enola, they're desperately trying to outrun the Smokers, and in the course of that sequence they run into a fog that completely obscures everyone's vision. What they do is turn off their engines and start drifting, hoping the current take them away. The next morning, the fog begins to dissipate, and they see this giant wall of steel, extending in either direction as far as the eye can see. A couple of people on the boat think this is 'Water's End,' the mythic term for land, and they climb aboard the ship, which is completely abandoned. There's a bird colony on it, and trees growing in little pockets of earth, so it's nature trying to reclaim the machine, and turn it back into land.

"Anyway, they start exploring and find the keeper of the ship, a bizarre little character who's also a crackpot inventor. One of the reasons there's a fog bank is he's artificially created it to hide the ship from the Smokers. He tells them 'You're welcome to stay on this boat, but I ask one thing – that you remove your shoes.' He explains – and this is factually true – that the fumes in the tank are so volatile that the friction from a single grain of sand scraping against the hull could act like a match, igniting the whole ship. It's actually a metaphor for the planet – if you share it in peace, you can all live on, but if you fight over it you can destroy it.

"Sure enough, the pirates find the ship the next morning, and surround it, and it becomes this medieval fortress that our band of six heroes try to defend against 200 Smokers, who are throwing grappling hooks and catapulting people on board. Meanwhile, as the bullets are flying, you're thinking 'This thing could go up at any second.'

"Ultimately, our heroes use an aeroplane to take off in the nick of time," he concludes, "abandoning the ship to the pirates. The pirate leader is screaming in glory, they've got the ship now – but there's a close-up of his foot, and on it there's a grain of sand. He skids, the sand ignites, and the ship blows up, so it was a totally different use of the tanker."

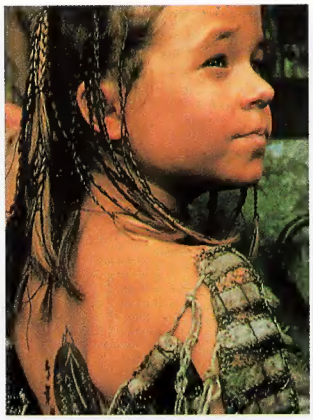
Jeanne Tripplehorn plays Helen, the woman who eventually befriends Costner.

So what's Rader's take on the film?

"I really liked the Mariner's gills and webbed feet," he smiles, "and the underwater sequence has a great quality. And I love the line, 'I'll breathe for both of us.' Also, I really like the moment where Enola has this long monologue about how great a warrior the drifter is, and you intercut between her talking and him killing the pirates. That part has a mythic quality to it, like a great Western. At that point, I felt they had captured the essence of the movie, which is basically a Western on water."

While Rader makes no bones about the "Max-factor" in *Waterworld*, he points to a much more basic influence: The classic Western, *Shane*. "The drifter comes into town, helps the homesteaders send off the bad guys, then drifts away. It has a great mythic structure, which goes back to Homeric times. It's the classic hero's quest pattern."

Waterworld *is out now and reviewed on page 70.*



Tina Majorino as Enola, the girl with the secret of dry land tattooed on her back.

Dennis Hopper, suitably over-the-top as Deacon, leader of the Smokers. He has a great death scene in the finished film, but his demise in the original script was spectacular too...

This *just* in...

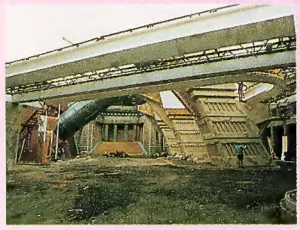
On, off, on, off, on again...

Throughout the '60s and '70s, *The Pan Books of Horror Stories* were essential reading for fans of all things dark and demonic. The series, edited by Herbert Van Thal, kicked off in 1959 (or '58, if you count the prototype collection *Told in the Dark*), and ground to a halt nearly 30 volumes later in the early '80s. In 1990 the series was revived under the title *Dark Voices*, with Stephen Jones and David Sutton sharing the editor's chair. Now Pan has dropped it again, but Gollancz has picked up the franchise. Its first volume, *Darker Voices*, should be out, suitably enough, around Halloween, and include stories from Ramsey Campbell, Kim Newman and Graham Masterton.

Besson's in his fifth element

Whatever it's going to be, it's going to be big. According to SFX sources, stylish French director Luc (*Nikita, Leon*) Besson's top secret SF project, *The Fifth Element*, is going to take over virtually every sound stage at Pinewood. "They reckon it's going to be bigger than *Dredd*," an insider told us. "In terms of sets, at least."

Not much is yet known about the plot of the movie, as the publicity-shy Besson is keeping details firmly under wraps, and no-one is willing to risk their job to let loose any details. But the film has been slowly progressing in pre-production in France for months now, and work on building specialised props and sets is expected to start in the Autumn, with principle photography commencing next February. More news as and when...



The impressive *Dredd* set. *The Fifth Element* "will be bigger," apparently.

New Douglas Adams on way

Douglas Adams is back at work on his eighth novel, after a break to play guitar with Pink Floyd and look after his baby daughter (Polly Jane Rocket Adams – we kid you not). The book – which started life many months ago as *A Spoon Too Short* – is currently entitled *The Salmon of Doubt*, and may undergo further titular alterations before publication. For some time it was scheduled to be a third outing for the "holistic detective" Dirk Gently, but he has now been written out.

Adams is currently distracting himself by running a new CD-ROM/video company, The Digital Village. One of its first releases will be a "live" video of Douglas reading from his works, recorded in London in August. Also scheduled are a CD-ROM of *The Meaning of Liff*, a spoof dictionary which Adams co-wrote with John Lloyd, and something called *Starship Titanic*, which was the original working title for *Mostly Harmless*, before it became a *Hitchhiker* novel.

15 degrees of separation

Some people claim you can link any one person in the world to any other in a mere six moves. But the same thing doesn't hold true of fictional characters – or does it? **MJ Simpson** tries his best...

Current favourite title in the SFX offices is a groovy comic from Dark Horse called *Tarzan vs Predator at the Earth's Core*, in which the amazing apeman battles a bunch of the mandibled ones in darkest DougMcLureland.

This set us thinking about crossover stories and titles, from *RoboCop vs Terminator* and *Dollman vs Demonic Toys* right back to *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* and *Billy the Kid vs Dracula*. Here's how a bunch of 'em fit together, from Joe Dredd right the way back to Joe Dredd in 15 moves...

Judge Dredd/Batman: Judgement on Gotham

The first *Dredd/Batman* crossover comic, in which Bruce Wayne finds himself in Dredd's hometown, and then vice versa. Inevitably, Dredd has to face off against a certain bat-obsessed psycho vigilante.

Batman vs Superman

Too many times to mention now, DC's two biggest stars have worked together and, occasionally, fought. Our favourite example is from the classic Frank Miller mini-series *The Dark Knight Returns*, in which, for a split second, Batman actually *wins!*

Superman vs Aliens

Dark Horse/DC crossover in which the Man of Steel locates a chunk of the planet Krypton, only to find it's been taken over by Giger's monsters.

Alien vs Predator

Dark Horse's crossover titles pits nasty sentient ETs against nasty non-sentient ETs, with assorted humans

caught in the middle. It's already spawned novels and a film script.

Tarzan vs Predator at the Earth's Core

The Lord of the Apes first visited Pelucidar in Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan at the Earth's Core*, published in *Blue Book* magazine, 1929-30; now he's back. And he isn't alone...

Tarzan on Mars

It's rumoured ERB at least *considered* sending Tarzan to the red planet...

Abbott & Costello go to Mars

Dodgy 1953 movie in which Bud and Lou conspicuously fail to go to Mars, unknowingly landing back on Earth.

Aw, no! We can't look. Poor Bambi gets carted back to MC One for Resyk (far left); fang face and Frankenstein's monster face off (above); Jekyll needs Hyde's help against Wolfman (left).

Abbott & Costello Meet Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde

An elderly Boris Karloff plays Dr J, with stuntman Eddie Parker doubling as Mr H. This 1953 flick also featured Dracula and Frankenstein.

Dr Jekyll & The Wolf Man

Spanish horrormeister Paul Naschy's 1971 film (aka *Dr Jekyll Y El Hombre Lobo*).

Wolfman of Count Dracula

Alternative title for Naschy's first study in lycanthropy, *La Marca Del Hombre Lobo*, which was released in the UK as *Hell's Creatures*. Daninsky becomes a werewolf and then gets attacked by vampires posing as, of all things, doctors!

Dracula vs Frankenstein

Take your pick: 1. Alternative title for Naschy's *Los Monstruos Del Terror* (1969). 2. Al Adamson's much re-edited atrocity which began life in 1966 as a monster-less biker flick, and eventually appeared in 1970 as a virtually biker-less monster flick. 3. Jess Franco's 1972 travesty, aka *Dracula, Prisoner of Frankenstein*.

King Kong vs Frankenstein

Unrealised pet project of stop-motion wiz Willis O'Brien, which, in 1962, was filmed as...

King Kong vs Godzilla

Mirth-inducing Toho monster-fest.

Godzilla vs Bambi

Legendary underground film, unauthorised by either Toho or Disney. A lovely baby deer frolics in the forest, and is then trodden on by a huge scaly foot. A classic!

Bambi vs Judge Dredd

Well, hardly. But a "Heavy Metal Dredd" strip from Rock Power magazine *did* see Dredd come up against a forest full of cute creatures, including one obvious Bambi knock-off, with predictably violent results.

If any readers can produce longer circular lists like this, send your suggestions, marked "15 degrees of separation," to SFX, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, Avon BA1 2BW. There's an SFX T-shirt for every one we use...

PRODUCTION HELL

(Movies "on the way" that have yet to break into the real world...)

Edited by **Steve Holland**

Movie, movies, movies, eh? The science fiction film bandwagon rolls on – and some of the projects currently in production sound very exciting indeed. How many will be made, though? That's the thing...

For more info, check the SFX Website at:

http://www.futurenet.co.uk

Key: Dir – Director; Scr – Scriptwriter; ExPrd – Executive Producer; Prd – Producer; St – Starring.

THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN (Scent Films) Scr Philip Poe. Prd Ilya Salkind, Jane Chaplin. Salkind plans an A-grade horror film as the opener from his recently founded Orlando-based production company. Involves a female Olympic athlete and a "poignant" romance with the hairy one, apparently. Shooting should start in September.

AFTERSHOCKS (Universal) Dir Steve Wilson. Scr Wilson & Brent Maddock. St Fred Ward, Michael Gross, Helen Shaver, Christopher Gorton. Sequel to *Tremors*, filmed earlier this year.

BARB WIRE (Propaganda Films/Dark Horse Entertainment)

We're not sure who's the cartoon – Pammy, or the original *Barb Wire*?

Dir David Hogan. Scr Chuck Pfarrar. ExPrd Steve Golin. Prd Mike Richardson, Todd Moyer, Brad Wyman. St Pamela Anderson, Temuera Morrison, Victoria Rowell, Xander Berkeley, Steve Railsback, Jack Noseworthy. $20 million actioner based on the Dark Horse comic strip vigilante. Began shooting in Los Angeles on 16 May, with Anderson declaring that Barb Wire, a bounty-hunting nightclub owner who defends her turf, Steel Harbour, "is not sugar and spice. She blows away baddies without any remorse." In the movie she's hired to escort a resistance figure through Steel Harbour to the Free Territories. Anderson was a major attraction at Cannes this year when she arrived to promote the film, but the shoot has been troubled. Originally announced with Adan Rifkin, who previously directed *The Dark Backward* at the helm, nine days into shooting he was replaced by music video director Hogan. The hoped for November release has already been pushed back to Spring 1996.

BIKER MICE FROM MARS Scr Greg Johnson. Prd Al Ruddy, Andre Morgan, David Chan.

BIOHAZARD 2 (Curb Organisation) Creature built by mad boffins threatens mankind.

BLACK PANTHER (Columbia) Dir John Singleton. Scr Terry *(Mad Max)* Haas. St Wesley Snipes. Prd Brad Weston, Bob Beitcher. Snipes has recently been quoted as saying that the

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"Don't quote us!"

Filming's started on the Marlon Brando-starring remake of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, with Ron Perlman of *Beauty & the Beast* and *Pulp Fiction*'s Samuel L Jackson as two of the human/animal crossbreeds. The film has apemen, pigmen, wolfmen, elephantmen and so on in full prosthetic make-up. Jackson, for instance, is half-lizard...

The much-talked-about *Alien vs Predator* has apparently been temporarily replaced in the schedules by another movie monster face-off – *Alien vs Species*! The battle of the Giger monsters will reportedly establish that Sil and the Aliens are in some way related – but hate each other's guts! It's hoped that Giger will design the whole thing...

The next Bond movie will probably be based on *Colonel Sun*, the Fleming plot finished off by Kingsley Amis. The title will change, though – "The Dream Weaver" has been mentioned – and Pierce Brosnan will again star. Meanwhile, all reports have it that *Goldeneye* is "the dog's bollocks." Some stunt scenes are being reshot, but it promises much – particularly the "one-helicopter vs five Harriers" fight, and a great opening sequence involving a spectacular bungee jump.

The next *Doctor Who* spin-off – said to be a low-budget movie aimed at a theatrical release, not a video – will see the Cybermen take on the Ice Warriors. Called *Cyberwar*, it's apparently being put together not by Bill Baggs of *The Stranger* videos fame, but another group of fans.

Caroline Batten – who wrote the reportedly excellent *Bermuda* script, so chased-over in Hollywood lately (see SFX2) – has apparently been approached to write *Batman Triumphant*, the film that will bring Jack Nicholson's Joker and Jim Carey's Riddler against Bats. Nicholson will only agree to star again, you see, if the script's *really* good...

"If this be

It's crisis time for the old superhero favourites like Captain America, Iron Man and Thor, now they're being left behind by younger, hipper characters. *Force Works* and *War Machine* writer **Dan Abnett** joins other Marvel creators for a much-needed redefining session. "Avengers Assemble! It's future-planning time!"

Iron Man – one of the major Marvel heroes felt to be in dire need of new direction...

Girding its corporate spandex pants for renewed combat with its lantern-jawed rivals in the superhero comics industry, Marvel Comics assembled the editors and creators of its "Marvel Heroes" line in Cresskill, New Jersey this July. The occasion: The second in a series of regular planning pow-wows.

This meeting, however, was more important than most. With the glory days of million-plus selling superhero comics waning fast, and the superhero market becoming an increasingly cut-throat business, some of the biggest victims have been the four-colour heroes of the traditional comic world – Captain America, Iron Man, The Mighty Thor, and The Avengers.

In recent years, these superhero greats have gradually become eclipsed by more youthful come-latelies from Image, plus, of course, the top-selling "regular" Marvel titles like *Spiderman*, and the unassailable Shangri-la that is the *X-Men* books.

As the co-writer of *Force Works* (once called *Avengers West Coast*, and led by Iron Man), and writer of the Iron Man spin-off comic *War Machine*, I have, of course, a vested interest in the fate of these comics legends. That said, I'd care about what happened to them even if I *wasn't* part of the creative team – the Marvel Heroes group, headed by editor Mark Gruenwald, contains many of the bastions of US comics from the last 30 publishing years, most of them created by Lee, Kirby and Heck, and propelled through the '70s and '80s by some of the finest talents to work on superheroes.

Something had to be done, obviously. Last February, at the previous meeting, 11 of us Keepers of the Flame had pondered the problems of declining sales and decided (after dangerous talk of killing everyone off, and filling the vacant spandex with X-alike kids) that there was really nothing wrong with these classic characters. They'd survived this long, after all, and remain among the most recognisable of all the Marvel heroes to those not in the habit of picking up regular monthly superhero comics.

No, the problem would appear to be that they're simply *too* familiar – as a bunch of heroes they're perceived by the kids who spend the most on superhero books to be old, middle-aged, and hard to identify with – and they need a facelift. And while us sad old anoraks might get a buzz out of a forthcoming 400th issue, the average kid in the street is more likely to run screaming from the sight of treble figures, and go for something hot launched a year ago instead – something he knows he can collect in its entirety, and which doesn't demand

script has been through a number of changes: "The one we've got now is going to be absolutely superb," says Snipes. One element he's pushed to the fore is to incorporate martial arts and stick fighting of Eastern and African tradition into the story.

THE BOYS FROM BRAZIL A sequel is in the works, based on the grown-up Nazi children who survived the original.

CAPTAIN ZOOM Dir Max Tash. Scr/ExPrd Brian Levant, Rick Copp, David Goodman. Planned made-for-cable movie to star Daniel Reardon as a superhero.

CARNOSAUR 3 (Concorde) Three-quel to the quickie

Ballard's *Crash* will be fun to film, as those who've read it will know.

Jurassic Park rip-off from Roger Corman will be back soon.

COMPLICITY (Talisman) Scr Bryan Ellsley. SFX1 star Iain Banks' novel is set to reach the big screen, thanks to support from British Screen.

CONTACT (Warner) Dir George (Mad Max) Miller. Prd Linda Obst, George Miller, Doug Mitchell. Or "lost contact" if you prefer: Much touted when she signed up, Jodie Foster has now dropped out of the planned big-budget version of Carl *Cosmos* Sagan's successful novel about first contact between humans and extraterrestrials.

The film is now expected to go into turnaround.

CRASH (Alliance/Recorded Picture Co.) Dir/Scr David Cronenberg. Prd Jeremy Thomas. Based on the novel by JG Ballard. The medium budget ($13 million) British production was recently greenlighted by financiers Alliance-MDP Worldwide to star James Spader, Holly Hunter and Rosanna Arquette. Shooting starts in Toronto on 18 September.

CYBER-STRIKE (Fusion Pictures) Dir/Scr Nick Kellis. ExPrd Lawrence Abramson, Eric Parkinson. Prd Michael Slifkin, Jack Abramoff. St Austin St John, Walter Jones, Thuy Trang. Began shooting in LA on 1 May.

DIMENSION (Miramax) Dimension is a newly (Spring 1995) founded division of Miramax set up to deal with science fiction/licensed projects. Dimension is also the name of an SF anthology series, which should see a theatrical release. Leonard Nimoy has been signed up to direct an episode; others also signed up for various half-hour segments include Gary Fleder, Guillermo *(Cronos)* del Toro. Fleder, whose *Things To Do When In Denver When You're Dead* debuted in Cannes in May, will film adapt Philip K Dick's short story "The Imposter.

DISCONNECTOR (DreamWorks) Scr Preston Sturges. Prd Mick Garris. Garris may also direct this script picked

mine sales figures..."

a doctorate thesis in Marvel Continuity to understand.

So what could we do to make our heroes hot again? Sadly, there's no secret recipe or formula to follow. Nonetheless, a combination of effort and luck may pay off. Sometimes a comic book becoming a hit is simply a matter of getting the right artist – someone fresh and on the climb who just happens to hit the right nerve with the readership. At other times, it's just a particular character that strikes a chord, and becomes a must-read; often for no obvious reason, and despite the writers' and editors' attempts to make some other character a significant draw instead.

Still, there were good things about our rivals' work that we *could* pinpoint. If the Marvel Heroes books as a whole lack anything it might be, well, *sex*. The super-hot X-titles thrive on maddeningly complex inter-personal events, but the *Avengers* group has always – true to Stan and Jack's original style – felt more like a club than a family. The idea of intrigues and sly affairs, dalliances and fallings out in the ranks of *The Avengers* and *Force Works* always seemed somehow unlikely. These are meant to be Earth's Mightiest Heroes, after all – they've become ultra-respectable. They just don't do that sort of thing.

Well, they bloody do now. Or they will do, as soon as we've implemented the stories planned out at Cresskill, New Jersey.

Assembled for this meeting were Marvel editors Gruenwald, Nel Yomtov and Ralph Macchio, with their respective assistants Joe Andreani, Mike Marts and Matt Idelson. In the freelance corner were *Captain America* writer Mark Waid (a genuine good-golly superstar, thanks to his superlative work on DC's *The Flash), Thor's* Bill Messner-Loebs (hot from his acclaimed run on *Wonder Woman),* myself and *Force Works* co-writer Andy Lanning (who's inking his way to stardom on *Fate* and other DC and Marvel projects at the same time), the *Avengers* team of Bob Harras (taking time off as guru on the *X-Men* family of books) and Terry Kavanagh (who also writes *Iron Man).*

We talked for three days, and plans were laid. Now I obviously can't tell you *exactly* what they were, but I will say this. There are shocks aplenty in store, and oodles of that engaging soap opera stuff the books have up until now always been short on. Many characters have been kitted out in new costumes, care of the *X-Men's* Joe Madureira and other well-known artists (and I defy anyone to loathe Quicksilver and the Black Widow's new looks, in particular), or had their tepid characters pared back to the stronger attitudes that first made them distinctive all those years ago (Hawkeye – who, like the Widow, started out as a villain – has been decidedly un-mellowed, for instance). And the three tent-pole characters of the group – Captain America, Iron Man and Thor – have been thrown in completely new directions.

Will it work? Time alone will tell, but if it doesn't it won't be for want of trying. The whole new approach is first to be seen in the *Avengers: The Crossing* special, out now, and then in the respective regular issues, which will follow as normal.

Hopefully, these moves will make a new generation of fans suddenly realise that Captain America and co are worth reading again...

The *Avengers* comic "The Crossing" (below) introduces a new look and direction for a number of Marvel favourites. Ex-Russian-spy The Black Widow (below left) has a great new outfit, while Hawkeye's (below right) is more ordinary.

up by DreamWorks SKG about a drug which splits the mind from the body.

FANTASTIC FOUR (Fox) Prd Chris Columbus. Based on the Marvel characters. Columbus recently founded his own production outfit, 1492 Films, and this project is still on the active development slate (along with five others, including a remake of the 1973 horror movie *Theatre of Blood).* Columbus has clearly emphasised that he plans to act *only* as producer.

FLASH GORDON (Mandalay Entertainment) Prd Peter (Batman) Guber. A big budget – bigger than the 1980 Sam Jones starring "Flash! Aha!" version – was first announced as under the auspices of producers Ben Myron and David Halpern, with a first-draft script by David S Goyer. Steven E De Souza was given the scripting chores, and is reported to be looking to the original Alex Raymond '30s comics for inspiration.

FROM BEYOND THE SUN Universal has picked up Josh Richmond's script about a new kind of human species. Ron Howard has been given first refusal on the director's chair.

FROM DUSK TILL DAWN (Miramax) Dir Robert (El Mariachi) Rodriguez. Scr Quentin Tarantino. ExPrd Lawrence Bender, Tarantino, Rodriguez. Prd Gianni Nunnari, Meir Teper. St George Clooney, Tarantino, Juliette Lewis, Harvey Keitel, Fred Williamson, Kelly Preston, Tom Savani. Somehow, Tarantino and blood are the perfect jigsaw fit for a $17 million vampire thriller shooting in LA. The QT co-stars as psycho bank-robber Richard Gecko, brother to (*ER* star) Clooney's Seth, who's just busted out of prison. On the run in Texas, they escape over the Mexican border, only to run into a bar full of vampires

This was Tarantino's first paid film job: he received $1,500 in 1990 for writing the script, based on a story by Robert Kurtzman and John Esposito. Miramax is obviously in a rush to get this out for 22 December.

***The Fantastic Four* in a classic period, drawn by John Byrne.**

THE GATHERING (New Line) Dir Mary Lambert. A group of people live off human suffering in this new Gothic horror from *Demon Knight* scriptwriter Cyrus Voris & Ethan Reiff.

GHOST (Dark Horse Entertainment/Universal) With *Barb Wire* garnering so much publicity, Dark Horse is prepping yet another comic strip babe for the screen. *Ghost* is currently at script stage.

GODZILLA (TriStar) ExPrd Barrie M Osborne, Ian Bryce. Prd Cary Woods, Rob Fried. Originally to be directed by Jan de Bont, who fell out with TriStar when his vision, which would have involved a computer-

Dinosaur power!

Red Ranger Jason – alias actor Austin St John – was one of a number of *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers'* stars to leave the show recently. But, surprisingly, missing out on the popular (in this office, anyway) movie and possible superstardom hasn't bothered him at all, discovers **Matt Bielby**...

"When I was about five years old," says Austin St John, "my father woke me up one morning, took me downstairs, and started teaching me the martial arts. It's been in my family for nine generations, and my son will be the tenth." If Austin has his way, St John Junior will have plenty of little pals to spar against – the ex-leader of the *Power Rangers* has produced a video, filmed in London, which aims to introduce kids to oriental fighting techniques.

"The thing is, I don't want kids thinking what they see on TV shows like *Power Rangers* is martial arts. That's not what they're all about. If something like the *Power Rangers* was about real life situations, I'd actually have a real problem with it."

St John is undeniably one tough guy – a student of 13 different martial arts, he's currently working on his fifth black belt, has done demo fights against up to 12 black belts at a time, and, along with Green (now White) Ranger Jason Frank, was the real fighting expert of the show. But before he got to play Jason, the Red Ranger, he'd never acted before...

"It was better than I thought," he laughs. "The trouble was, *Rangers* was filmed fast – it was just 'camera, action, go' – which was tough. I made mistakes, and even at the end I wasn't completely comfortable with it."

So how much did they tell you about the character when you started?

"Not a great deal, just that he was an all-American boy and a leader. I created a past for him myself, but he wasn't much like me. I like my Harley and my Jeep, and just disappearing into the mountains, y'know?"

Power Rangers is famous for re-using footage from its producer's Japanese shows, like *Zyu Ranger*, for the action and monster scenes. "Sure, a lot of the episodes used Japanese footage," Austin remembers, "but after the first 60 or so they ran out, and we had to start doing things in the States."

Had he any inkling that the show would be such a success?

"Not at all! Thinking about it, though, it had everything kids want – from camaraderie between the races to martial arts to rock 'n' roll."

Bizarrely, GMTV – which has had such great ratings from showing *Power Rangers* each morning – recently refused to have Austin as a guest on the programme, scared it'd refire the debate on whether the Rangers are too violent for kids or not. It's not something Austin has much time for.

"There's always going to be someone who'll look for the bad in everything. You've probably got some uptight parent who started it, and then others jumped on the bandwagon. It's just ridiculous, because *Power Rangers* goes out of its way to explain that solving your problems with violence isn't the answer."

Although Austin's jumped from the *Power Rangers* boat, and doesn't feature in the latest episodes or the film, he doesn't think he's missing out on much. "The thing is, it's been losing ratings in America recently, and the movie did pretty bad. I think the bubble's burst."

So what did he think of the movie?

"I haven't actually seen it. I still hang around with the two actors who left the show with me, though, and we had a party recently where the Pink Ranger and all the new ones came round the house."

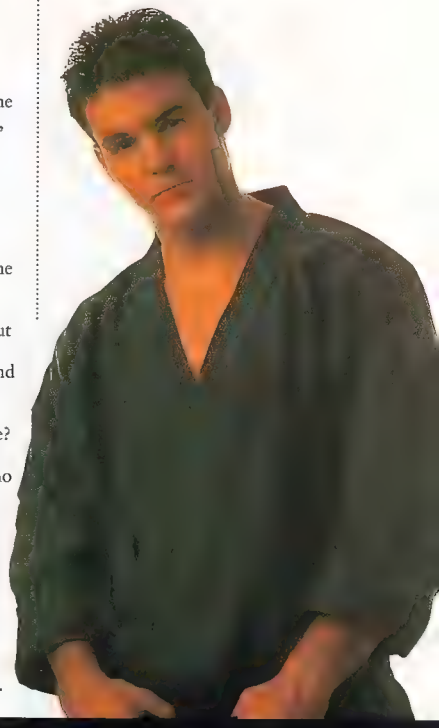
There's just one more question I need to ask: Any chance of Pink Ranger's phone number – for professional purposes, of course?

"Er, no, I don't think she'd appreciate that..."

Austin's video, Karate Warrior, *is now on sale from Paradox Video, priced £9.99.*

"If something like the *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* was about real life situations, I'd have a real problem with it."

Austin St John



He's missed a trick not wearing red PJs, but then Austin St John is no longer a Power Ranger, and is glad of the fact too.

generated monster for Godzilla to battle, pushed the projected cost to $130 million. TriStar want to limit the budget to $100m. Was set to go into production in March, but this was delayed by de Bont's departure. Latest news has it that Don Macpherson has been brought in to rewrite the script so that there's more on the humans than the monsters.

GODZILLA VERSUS DESTROYER (Toho) Dir Takao Ogawara. Scr Kazuki Omori. Prd Shoko Tomiyama. Yep, he's back in Japan too. The latest reptile-fest began shooting in mid-July and is expected to wrap mid-September. This will be the last of the *Godzilla* movies, says Shogo Tomiyama of Toho Co.

Latest comic character to get a movie is the barely-known *Ghost*.

HIGHLANDER: THE IMMORTALS (Dimension). With a subtitle like *The Final Dimension*, you just knew *Highlander 3* couldn't be "final." Miramax's new Dimension division have rolled out plans for a new sword-and-SF sequel revolving around other members of the time-travelling immortals clan. The lead character will be younger, though no casting has been announced.

HONEY, I... Rick Moranis will be back in '96 for a direct-to-vid movie. Little news yet, so just fill in the title yourself...

THE ISLAND OF DR MOREAU (Moreau Productions/Edward R. Pressman/New Line) Dir Richard Stanley. Scr Walen Green, Michael Hare, Richard Stanley. Prd Ed *(The Crow, Judge Dredd)* Pressman. ExPrd Tim Zinnemann. St Marlon Brando, Val Kilmer, Samuel L Jackson, Ron *(Beauty and the Beast)* Perlman. James *(Star Gate)* Spader looks likely to join the cast of this new adaptation of the HG Wells novel about genetically humanised animals, which already boasts Brando as the lead character – Moreau, not the island – and Perlman as his humanised right-hand manimal. The shoot will begin in North Queensland, Australia, before moving to Sydney, and was recently pushed back (again) from 1 August to October.

JACKER 2: DESCENT TO HELL (Falcon Video) Dir/Prd Barry Gaines. Scr/ExPrd Philip Herman. St Philip Herman, Barry Gaiwes, Nancy Feliciano, Dyan Kane, Ben Stanski. Straight-to-vid vehicle for scriptwriting star Herman, due to begin shooting in New York on 28 August.

LOST IN SPACE (Neufeld/Rehme Productions) Akiva *(The Client, Batman Forever)* Goldsmith has confirmed he is to script a movie based on the classic Irwin Allen TV series, which ran for 83 episodes between 1963-68.

MANSLAYER Based on Jay R Bonaninga's novel, *The Black Mariah*, the story concerns a

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WOOLWORTHS

All items subject to availability

Mojo rising

Supernatural horror writer, science fiction author, crime scribbler, and comics scribe – Joe R Lansdale is all these, and more. How come hardly anyone in this country has heard of him then, asks **MJ Simpson**...

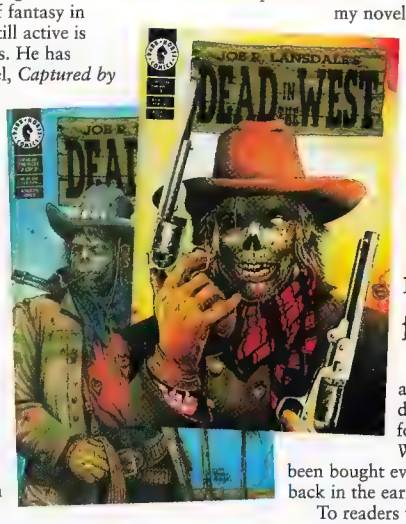
Joe R Lansdale is a difficult author to pigeonhole. Usually categorised as a horror writer, he also writes Westerns, science fiction, thrillers and other, uncategorisable, work. His latest book, *Mucho Mojo* (Gollancz, £15.99, hardback) is a sequel of sorts to his 1990 novel *Savage Season*, recounting the further adventures of Hap Collins (a white, straight guy) and his best friend Leonard Pine (a black, gay guy).

"I never intended to write a series at all," says Joe. "When I wrote *Savage Season* I was pretty pleased with it. But when I tried to write another, different book, the damn characters wouldn't leave me alone, so I wrote *Mucho Mojo*. I have another one written about the characters too, called *The Two Bear Mambo*, which comes out here next year."

Although it's a terrific book, *Mucho Mojo* is strictly outside the SFX remit, a dark, psychological murder mystery and not really horror or SF at all. This seems to be the new direction Joe's taking.

"I think I've actually been going that way for a long time," he admits. "The first novel under my own name was a crime novel, *Act of Love*, but it was published as horror. I love supernatural horror, but I've always had more of an inclination towards dark crime. I think with novels I'm much more comfortable with non-supernatural subjects. Last year, I wrote *Buba Hotep*, a supernatural novella, which was up for the Bram Stoker Award this year. I also did a collection called *Writer of the Purple Rage*, which contained an off-beat Godzilla story called 'Godzilla's Twelve Step Program'."

One area of fantasy in which Joe is still active is *Batman* stories. He has written a novel, *Captured by the Engines*, a juvenile novella, *Terror on the High Skies*, a story for the *Further Adventures of Batman* anthology, plus three episodes of *Batman: The Animated Series*.



"I did one with the Mad Hatter called 'Perchance To Dream,' which I think is the best one I did, and one called 'Read My Lips' with the Ventriloquist. The third one, 'Showdown,' which hasn't come out yet, has Jonah Hex in it."

Joe has written two comic series about Jonah Hex, and his weird, Wild West world: "Two-Gun Mojo" and "Riders of the Worm And Such." His other comic work includes *The Lone Ranger* for Topps: "I have a new series, a kung fu Lone Ranger story set in Chinatown in San Francisco, coming out with a new artist who I think is just wonderful. Also, Mark Nelson and I collaborated on *Blood and Shadows*, which should be out this Autumn or early next Spring through Vertigo. It's a horror comic; it's science-fictional; it's a Western."

Although some of Joe's own novels – such as his zombie Western *Dead in the West* – have been adapted as comics, he has yet to see any movie adaptations: "I did a screenplay for my novel *Cold in July* about eight years ago, but they're still messing around. And I did a screenplay for *Dead in the West*, which has been bought ever since I did it back in the early '80s."

> **"I don't know if I'm the sort of writer that the British are going to latch on to – I may be just too American for them!"**
> Joe Lansdale, author

To readers wondering why they haven't yet encountered much of Lansdale's work, the answer is because a lot of it has had a very limited distribution in the UK.

"A lot of people enjoy being a cult figure, but you want to grow beyond that. You want to be available to reach the people who want to read you, and to let people who might not know they would like your work have the opportunity to explore it. One of the reasons for my visit to Britain is to pursue that side of it. *Two Bear Mambo* is coming out here next year, and I'm hoping to get a solid publisher here who'll publish my stuff, including the back catalogue. I don't know if I'm the sort of writer the British are going to latch on to, though – I may be a bit too American for them!"

And strange too – after all, one of the keys to Joe's success is what he calls "popcorn dreams."

He laughs. "It used to be that when I didn't have an idea, and couldn't come up with a story, my wife would brew up some popcorn. It's a special blend that she would put together, and it would give me bad dreams. The next morning I would write them down and sell them! A lot of the stories I have written are based on dreams I have had through over-indulgence in popcorn."

So what are the best places to start for those interested in discovering Joe R Lansdale? DC Comics' Jonah Hex: Two Gun Mojo *graphic novel, collecting together the mini-series, is the obvious starting point for his comics work. For his prose work, though, Joe Lansdale himself recommends* By Bizarre Hands.

female psychiatrist who morphs into a comic character. The $6.5m film is to be produced by Steven Menkin & Stuart S Shapiro.

MICKEY SPILLANE'S MIKE DANGER (Miramax) Optioned by Miramax's Dimension division, and one of a three property deal. Spillane's future hard-boiled detective debuted in 1995, and Spillane has even expressed a desire to script the movie himself.

NOT OF THIS EARTH (Concorde) Again? Already-done-twice story of a space vampire who wants to use the Earth as a blood bank for his own atom-war ravaged planet. The original 1957 version, starring Paul Birch, was B-movie schlock; the 1988 remake was notable only for starring porn queen Traci Lords. Should be seen in the US this year as part of the "Roger Corman Presents..." series, which began screening on Showtime in July with nuclear thriller, *Suspect Device*.

THE PHANTOM (Robert Evans Co./Village Roadshow Pictures) Dir Joe Dante. Scr Jeffrey Boam. ExPrd Graham Burke, Greg Coote, Peter Sjoquist, Bruce Sherlock. Prd Robert *(Silver)* Evans, Mike Finnell. Based on Lee Falk's comic strip, which debuted in American newspapers in 1936, the movie has already had a troubled history: At first, the project was under the wing of Douglas Reuther Productions and was due to begin shooting in Australia in September 1994, with Joe Dante directing. Dante was reported as looking for an unknown to play the title role. By November, Billy Zane was brought in to star as the "Man Who Never Dies," Cameron *(The Mask)* Diaz was also attached, and the shoot delayed until the Spring of 1995. When the start date came and went, Douglas Reuther's interest evaporated and the project was considered dead. Strangely, the moving of *The Saint* movie at Paramount left an opening for a Memorial Day release, and *The Phantom* has since been put on the fast track, with Simon *(Operation Dumbo Drop)* Wincer signed up to helm. Zane is still attached, with an October release planned.

THE POSTMAN (Warner) Scr Brian Helgeland. Adaptation of David Brin's excellent post-Apocalyptic novel. Hopes were that Ron Howard would direct and Tom Hanks would star, but neither are associated any more.

PRIME (New World) Based on the Malibu Comics character about a young boy trapped inside a superhuman body.

SCREAMERS (TriStar) Dir Christian Duguay. Scr Dan *(Alien)* O'Bannon. St Peter Weller. Based on Second Variety by Philip K Dick, ex-*RoboCop* Weller plays the leader of a ragtag squad of Alliance soldiers in battle against the New Economic Bloc of Sirius B. The good guys of the Alliance have created war machines known as screamers which develop awareness and kill everyone. Sounds fun, and should be released in October.

SHI William Tucci's bad girl warrior character has attracted a lot of Hollywood attention. The star of the top-selling comic has even attracted attention from potential players Tia *(True Lies)* Carrera and Uni *(Tek War)* Park. Warners is said to be courting Tucci strongly...

SHOCKWAVE (Live Entertainment) Dir David Twohy.

Not sure whether to collect the latest Star Trek™ action figures?

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Talk about collectable! Few fans will be able to resist the first ever Star Trek talking action figures. Fully articulated and highly articulate, each 7" (18cm) character speaks three of their most popular phrases. Simply push a button to hear the actual character's voice from the TV series, in digital sound.

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"Then the willows must scuttle carefully"

JM Straczynski's Babylon 5 doesn't just feature funny dialogue – it's also packed with interesting little in-jokes and references to other famous SF shows. **Jim Swallow** picks a handful of his favourites...

In "The Soul Hunter" and "Believers," the space liner Asimov makes an appearance, while in "A Spider in the Web," the Earth Alliance Cruiser Pournelle is mentioned. Both, of course, are named after well known SF authors – Isaac Asimov and Jerry Pournelle.

Series creator JM Straczynski is a big fan of the old British show *The Prisoner*, and among the many references to this show is Bester in "Mind War" saying, "Be seeing you, Commander," to Sinclair. JMS has admitted that this is a kind of nod to the cult '60s series.

In the two-part episode from the first season "A Voice in the Wilderness," many have noticed similarities in scale and viewpoint between the chasm filled with enormous technology and the chasm in the 1956 film *Forbidden Planet*. JMS says "The script called for a chasm, and I got three different storyboards from Ron Thornton [of Foundation Imaging, who do *Babylon 5*'s special effects]. The best-looking one was that one, so that's what we used."

Of course, the keenest fans are prone to see things that aren't there. The Minbari refer to Captain Sheridan as "The Star Killer," for instance, but while there is an admiral with a similar nickname ("Old Star Killer") in *Blake's 7*, JMS insists there is no link. "Sheridan destroyed the Black Star. Hence, Star Killer." It's as simple as that.

So, who is... Damon Knight?

Briefly: SF writer, critic and editor, who came to prominence in the '50s with witty short stories, and in the '60s and '70s achieved pre-eminence as an editor of original and reprint SF anthologies. He edited the famous but short-lived *Worlds Beyond* magazine in 1950-51.

Is he any good? Yes and no. He never really got the hang of novels, preferring to work to shorter word-lengths, where he could produce some sparkling classics. He won a Hugo in 1956 for a collection of reviews called *In Search Of Wonder*.

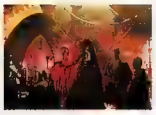
Major works: The Orbit series of anthologies; 21 volumes which Knight edited from 1966 to 1980. His own stories were collected in the '60s as *Far Out, In Deep, Off Centre* and *Turning On*.

What's he like? *The Encyclopaedia of SF* calls Knight's work "urbane and darkly humorous." As a critic, he believed in the retention of literary values in SF. Some SF historians believe AE Van Vogt never recovered from critical savaging by Knight in a 1945 fanzine, *Destiny's Child*.

Key themes: As writer, that things could be worse, and may turn that way just when we're least expecting it – irony is a major force in Knight's universe. As editor, that SF stories can be well-written and meaningful. There's simply no room for pulp fiction in a Knight anthology.

Suggested reading: If you only read one Damon Knight story in your life, SFX recommends "To Serve Man," which has one of the best twists of all time.

Is he actually name-checked in the *Star Fleet* signature tune?: Several readers have written in to point out that the second line is in fact "Alien raiders just passed Gemini." We here at SFX, while accepting that this may be correct, still prefer our own version, which goes: "Alien raiders just passed Damon Knight." Writer, critic, editor... And now, galactic sentinel!



There's a revolution going on in the world of computer games. Suddenly, major Hollywood stars are ultra-keen to appear in big-budget SF stories – or "interactive movies" – that their fans will never get to see on the big screen. *The Darkening* is the most ambitious attempt yet, writes **Matt Bielby**...

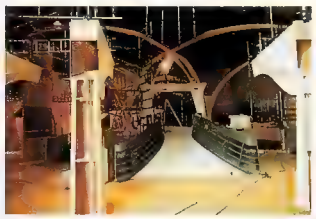
Dark future

Here's a teaser for you: What SF "movie" stars genre favourites Jurgen Prochnow, Christopher Walken, David Warner, and John Hurt, is loaded with special effects, cost a fortune – and will never be seen either at the cinema or on TV? The answer is, of course, one of the new breed of CD-ROM computer games, which use well-known actors in an "interactive movie" that's at least as ambitious as many films.

Arguably the most complicated interactive movie to date is *The Darkening*, recently shot by Electronic Arts at Pinewood, and featuring, alongside Hurt *et al*, Amanda Pays, Mary Tamm, Brian Blessed, David McCallum and Mathilda May (the naked space alien, so "impressive" in *Lifeforce*). Star of the thing is Clive Owen – TV's *Chancer* – who plays a chap who awakens from cryogenic storage, *Demolition Man*-style, ten years into his own future. Trouble is, he's lost his memory – and people are out to kill him! It's your job, among other things, to keep him alive...

The Darkening tells a tale spanning eight planets and assorted spaceships, and will be available on PC CD-ROM in February '96.

If EA pulls it off, this sort of thing could become a normal part of any actor or film director's repertoire – as well as provide a significant boost to the British film industry.



Mary Tamm (top), Brian Blessed and Clive Owen (above right) muck in with some *even bigger* stars (Hurt, Walken *et al*) in the impressive CD-ROM game *The Darkening*.

St Charlie Sheen. An astronomer discovers aliens have invaded Earth. Originally due to roll in Mexico in April; now will start in October.

SPACE TRUCKERS (IAC Films/Peter Newman Productions) Dir Stuart Gordon. Scr Ted Mann, St Dennis Hooper, Stephen Dorff. $17 million action-comedy due to go before the cameras in Autumn 1994 – but was still in production hell as of last February. The film's about three working-class lads who have to transport dangerous cargoes through space. Latest news has it that the title has been scrapped, but no replacement title has been decided upon. Production was due to begin at Ardmore Studios, near Dublin.

SPAWN (New Line) Dir Mark Dippe. Scr Alan McElroy. Prd Clint Goldman. Based on the best-selling comic by Todd MacFarlan, which tells the story of a murdered FBI agent who comes back from the dead as a deadly hellspawn. ILM sfx.

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION (Paramount). Another *Trek* movie was inevitable. This will star only the *TNG* crew, and already has a tentative November '96 release date. Rick Berman, executive producer of *TNG*, has been signed up to co-write and produce once again, and recently revealed that the next movie will feature the Borg. Brannon Braga and Ronald D Moore will script.

STARSHIP TROOPERS (TriStar) Dir Paul Verhoeven. Scr Ed Neumier. Prd Jon Davison. Film of Robert A Heinlein's classic novel of a military team assembled to travel to the home world of giant insects that are invading Earth.

THUNDERBIRDS After the live-action idea was canned, Gerry Anderson returns to basics with a stop-motion version, aided and abetted by *Nightmare Before Christmas*' Henry Selick.

TREASURE PLANET (20th Century Fox) Scr Randall McCormick. Prd David Kirschner. Treasure Island in space with a cyborg Long John Silver, once mooted to be the always bankable Mel Gibson...

TYKO MOON (Solome Productions) Fantasy from French comic artist Enki Bilal, to star Julie Delpy. David Bowie was originally wooed to play an amnesiac who offers a dictator immortality. Shooting in France and Germany.

VIRUS (Universal) Scr Chuck Pfarrer. Prd Gale Ann Hurd. Based on the Dark Horse comic, this is one of three films called "Virus" currently filming.

YESTERDAY'S TARGET (Showtime Networks/IRS Media) Prd Larry Estes. Showtime unveiled 40 made-for-TV films in July, including this time-travel yarn starring Daniel Baldwin, LeVar Burton and Malcolm McDowell as chrononauts trying to alter history.

THE ZONE (Media World Features) Australian SF thriller backed by the Australian Film Finance Corp and Film Victoria. Should crank up on 9 October under director John Tatoulis.

THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE.

Apollo 13 The True Story.

On April 11, 1970, the flight of Apollo 13 began as a routine mission of scientific exploration. However, due to a serious power supply malfunction in the spacecraft, the mission was terminated early. The lives of the 3 astronauts hung in the balance as Mission Control struggled to get them home from nearly 200,000 miles out in space. The world held its breath...

The Apollo Story.

In October 1957 the Soviet Union launched Sputnik 1, the worlds first artificial satellite, and so opened a technological race in space with the United States of America. Yuri Gagarin became the first human to enter space in 1961 and when Astronaut Alan Shepard's mission for the United States a few weeks later attracted massive media attention President Kennedy decided to act; he told Congress that the United States would land a man on the moon and return him safely to Earth before the end of the decade. The Apollo programme was born...

"We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and to do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard. Because that goal will serve to organise and measure the best of our abilities and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win..."

(President J.F. Kennedy 1961).

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SCIENCE MUSEUM
LONDON

David Duchovny auditions a new partner for season three of *The X-Files*...

The truth is out there...

THE CREATOR OF THE X-FILES SPEAKS!

THE X FACTOR

THE X-FILES IS THE TV SUCCESS STORY OF THE DECADE. NOW, WITH SEASON THREE FILMING FOR AUTUMN '95 SCREENINGS IN THE US, AND THE EARLIER SEASONS RUNNING WORLDWIDE, THE SHOW IS GOING FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH. BUT WHAT'S THE SECRET BEHIND ITS SUCCESS – WHAT'S "THE X-FACTOR"? TO FIND OUT, **JIM SWALLOW** TALKS TO ITS CREATOR CHRIS CARTER, AND **ALAN ADAMS** DIGS UP SOME WEIRD FACTS...

The origins of what would become *The X-Files* – the Fox Network's biggest ever hit, only rivalled by its similarly cultish, but entirely different, *The Simpsons* – began long before the show's September 1993 première. Series creator Chris Carter had been harbouring the basic idea for a while. His plan? To create "something very, very scary." Recalling childhood nightmares, inspired by the popular-but-short-lived 1974 monster-hunting show, *Kolchak: The Night Stalker,* Carter came up with the idea of two mismatched FBI agents drawn into a shadowy world of conspiracies and dark, unseen forces. Development of the series only began properly in 1992, however, when Carter's

© Brian Aris

Chris Carter, ex-surfer, ex-sitcom writer, *Kolchak*-fan, and creator of *The X-Files*...

tenure at 20th Century Fox brought him to a stage where his experience gave executives the confidence to let him come up with his own concept. They'd probably expected a comedy from him, or some kind of youth show – that was, after all, what Carter was known for. But what he gave them was *very* different...

CHRIS CARTER'S WRITING CAREER STARTED IN HIS EARLY 20S, AS A journalist on *Surfing Magazine,* where he was promoted to editor within five years. Then, in 1985, he joined The Walt Disney Studios as a screenwriter, where he quickly came to the attention of boss Jeffery Katzenberg – now a co-founder of the new Dreamworks SKG studio, along with Steven Spielberg and David Geffen. The opportunity to write several Disney Channel TV movie-of-the-weeks followed, then the pilots for NBC's *Cameo By Night* and a Disney sitcom, *The Nanny.* After cutting his production teeth on *Rags to Riches,* another comedy series, he created and acted as executive producer on *Brand New Life* – yes, another situation comedy. It's not the sort of background I'd expected for the man who came up with *The X-Files,* but it taught him the trade, got him a contract at Fox – and eventually earned him his chance to create an all-new show for the Fall '93 season.

"*The X-Files* is what I always wanted to be doing," Carter remembers. "When I came to Hollywood, I had a native talent for 'youth dialogue,' having spent so much time on the beach with surfers, so I naturally became a little pigeon-holed – people just kept hiring me to do that."

However, it wasn't wasted time. While he waited for a suitable creative avenue to appear, the sitcoms enabled him to develop and refine his screenwriting skills. "When you first come to Hollywood, you're happy to just be paid to write," he remembers, "but I was looking for a chance to do my scary show, and *The X-Files* was the eventual result. I was never what you'd call a science fiction devotee, though – I've never read the classic SF novels, except maybe one of each by Ursula LeGuin and Robert Heinlein a long time ago, and I've never watched an episode of *Star Trek!*"

What he did like, though, were "cult" shows – programmes in the mould of the classic paranoia series T*he Invaders, Project UFO, The Outer Limits* and, yes, *Kolchak*. The influences were clear to other cult

fans from the beginning – not that, when the show first came out, it seemed like many people shared Carter's affection for the genre. Certainly, the mainstream TV critics hardly noticed *The X-Files* when it hit the traditionally barren Friday night slot.

Go back to September '93, and you'll see that that US TV's season's premières were a mixed bunch. The two most eagerly awaited new science fiction shows – *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* and Spielberg's *seaQuest DSV* – competed for the Sunday night slot, popularised by *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, with the mainstream stalwart *Murder She Wrote*. From the start, it was clear *Superman* had something going for it, while *seaQuest* looked troubled. Meanwhile, hardly anyone noticed the muted arrival of Chris Carter's baby, a weird horror/drama/SF affair with an unusually muted tone.

THE GRASS ROOTS SUCCESS BEGAN FIRST. AS THE episodes went by, word-of-mouth enthusiasm voiced by viewers soon spread – and before long some critics, too, started giving the series their seal of approval. It wasn't a hit yet, by any means, but a cult *had* started to form. Carter himself was pleased, but a little taken aback: "It was amazing! It still amazes me..." he says.

Equally amazed (and pleased) were his masters at Fox. Sure, the figures hadn't been shockingly good, particularly at first – at one point, the show was down to a feeble 78th place among prime time shows, which could have meant cancellation – but enough people at Fox affiliated stations across the country believed in the show to keep it going. The sponsors were also pleased – young viewers in valuable ad brackets were tuning in, mirroring the support earlier generations had given to shows like *Star Trek* and *Kolchak*. The final score at the end of the first season was a Nielsen rating of 9.0 rating (equivalent to around 8,586,000 households across America), which put it at a middling but respectable 57th overall...

But this was just the beginning... Critical praise for the series, following the show's gradual acquisition of cult status, was now coming thick and fast. Among the awards showered on the series were the coveted Golden Globe for Best Television Drama, nominations for the Environmental Media Award and Television Critics Association Award, and endorsements like *Entertaiment Weekly* magazine's 1994 Program of the Year and the Viewers for Quality Television seal of approval. Fame didn't stop in America either. Here in the UK, for instance, it did brilliant business on first Sky TV and then BBC 2 – the latter gaining figures previously unheard of for the station.

"If there's one thing that gives the show a broad, universal appeal, it's that we're all afraid of the same things," suggests Carter, "so what scares us in America scares you in Great Britain, and scares people in Spain, Australia and the 60 countries where *The X-Files* is playing too."

WHILE CARTER'S BRILLIANT ORIGINAL IDEA – TO HAVE TWO LIKEABLE, but extremely professional and businesslike, FBI agents investigate cases of the paranormal or unexplained ("X-Files," in FBI speak) every week – was clearly responsible for a lot of the success of the show, much credit must also be given to his choice of stars. The barely-known David Duchovny (who played Fox "Spooky" Mulder, the obsessive believer in the supernatural) and Gillian Anderson (the pragmatic unbeliever Scully) played it commendably straightfaced, possessed a quiet "they'll-grow-on-you" sexuality, and rapidly became international stars of some considerable stature. It's their muted chemistry that drives much of the show.

Oddly, while Duchovny has made no secret of his opinion on the unexplained – which is poles apart from his all-believing alter-ego Mulder – his co-star Anderson is much more open-minded. But what of Chris Carter? What are his thoughts on the events he writes about every week?

"I'm a disbeliever," he admits, somewhat disappointingly. "I'm a sceptic by nature, but I'm desperate for a paranormal experience! I'd love nothing more than to have something unexplainable happen to me and test my faith. Like Fox Mulder, I really want to believe. I really do want to have a religious experience..."

IT'S NOW THREE YEARS SINCE CARTER BEGAN WORKING "for real" on *The X-Files*, and with a third season currently being filmed (for showing on Fox in the Autumn), it's going from strength to strength. For Carter, however, the whole thing still feels a bit like a dream. "I think I've been living in a time-warp over the last three years," he says. "People ask me to think back, remember dates and so on, but I can't – it's all just a blur! I haven't been able to step far enough away from the show to appreciate what we've done."

Many people suggest that shows like *The X-Files'* normally succeed when they've got one single-minded creator in charge of it all *(Star Trek's* Gene Roddenberry and *Babylon 5's* J Michael Straczynski spring to mind), but Carter has little truck with the idea of the all-powerful producer.

"I discuss everything with *everyone*," he says, emphatically. "The show's a completely collaborative process, and I just try to keep a overview on everything that's going on. There are so many talented people working on *The X-Files*, who've made it a success – everyone has input – that I just try to make sure that it all integrates into the vision I originally had. If there's a secret to the show's success, it's just the secret of all good television. We tell interesting stories, about interesting characters, played by excellent actors... I think that's basically all there is to it."

They'll come...

13 MYSTERIES THAT MULDER AND SCULLY HAVE YET TO INVESTIGATE.

Oh no! This particular Yogi seems to have simulated death rather *too* well!

1. The curse of the pyramids/ pharaoh's tomb.
2. Psychic surgery.
3. DERO's – DEtrimental RObots, which apparently "exist within the Earth to enslave and torment mankind."
4. "Appearing Persons" – People who have no idea who they are, or where they came from.
5. Lake or sea monsters (Loch Ness, Lake Ogopogo...)
6. Dragon lines of force around megalithic stone circles.
7. Killer dolphins – the famous US Navy Black project.
8. Phantom big cats or black dogs – like the infamous Beast of Bodmin, or even Bolsover..
9. Russian and American Cold War psychokinesis experiments.
10. Paranormal pets – predicting earthquakes and natural disasters.
11. An Indian Yogi's simulation of the death state.
12. Tantric sexual rites.
13. The Mothmen/Giant Birdmen of North America.

THE X-FILES: THE SEASONS

Season one: The Beginning

THE FIRST SEASON OF *THE X-FILES* SAW CARTER WEARING MANY HATS on the production staff, acting as executive producer, and writing

"I was never a science fiction devotee – I've never read the classic SF novels, except maybe one of each by Ursula LeGuin and Robert Heinlein, and I've never watched Star Trek!"

Chris Carter

OPEN

several of the shows' more solid hits (the pilot, "Deep Throat," "Darkness Falls" and "The Erlenmeyer Flask"), as well as few misses ("The Jersey Devil" and "Space"). Carter's core creative squad for those first shows included director David Nutter (from *Trancers 4 & 5, 21 Jump Street, Superboy,* and *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventures),* whose atmospheric work on episodes like "Tooms" and "Beyond The Sea" enhanced those shows, and whose handling of "Ice" raised it from being a mere rip-off of *The Thing* to a substantial thriller in its own right. Also crucial were writers Glen Morgan and James Wong (of *21 Jump Street, Wiseguy* and *Booker),* who, along with Carter, were responsible for such excellent instalments as "E.B.E.," "Beyond The Sea" and the popular stories about stretchy liver-eating mutant Eugene Victor Tooms, "Squeeze" and "Tooms."

For the first season – and subsequent ones – the show's production company, Ten Thirteen, worked out of Vancouver in Canada's British Colombia, using the ample woodland scenery to be found locally to double for assorted wet, wooded areas of the United States. Episodes were often set in lookalike areas like New Jersey, upstate New York or the Pacific Northwest. That said, at times the British Colombian environs have been forced to double – much less happily – for areas as diverse as Alaska and Texas too. More than once, the show's whiff of pine needles has invoked memories of *Twin Peaks,* thus drawing unintended comparisons between the two shows.

Not that Carter has paid much attention to comparisons – or anything else the critics say. He simply hasn't had the time. "In a way, it didn't dawn on me – still hasn't – what we were managing to do," he says. "The show has found its way into a lot of different places, and we're getting quite a bit of press, but, to be honest, to me it's still the same really demanding, hard job. Success doesn't make it any easier – in fact, it makes it harder. Doing well is great, but the trick will be to keep it interesting, to keep re-inventing the work that we do."

Which episodes from the first series does he still really like, I wonder? Which ones does he think will stand the test of time?

"From the first season, I think 'Beyond the Sea' was just a wonderful piece of dramatic work," he says, referring to a story (one he himself wrote, incidentally!) which guested Brad Dourif as a psychic on Death Row, and featured the death of Scully's father. "It worked for me on every level – it was extremely well done, and I was very proud of it."

Yeuch!

13 GROSSEST SCENES IN THE X-FILES SO FAR...

Mulder looks worried – something icky's probably happening just out of shot...

1. Post mortem of the Russian sailor, when the fluke comes out of his liver, in **"The Host."**
2. Alien spore coming out of people's throats in **"Firewalker."**
3. Mutant siamese twin Leonard (also one of the worst special effects, sadly) in **"Humbug."**
4. Post mortem of the elephant in **"Fearful Symmetry."**
5. The voodoo priest pulling himself out of Scully's throat in **"Fresh Bones."**
6. The dissolution of Mulder's sister Samantha in **"End Game."**
7. The pus-shooting boils on the faces of victims in **"F. Emasculata."**
8. The decapitated heads in the cabinet in **"Our Town."**
9. The eyes and tongue of the murder victim kept in the science teacher's drawers in **"Die Hand Die Verletzt."**
10. Dr Keat's head-breaking, after being submerged in liquid nitrogen, and his murderer standing on and shattering his nose in **"Roland."**
11. The worm pulled out of the back of the pilot's neck in **"Ice."**
12. The burnt Leonard Vance in **"Miracle Man."**
13. The desiccated body of the lumberjack found in a tree in **"Darkness Falls."**

THE X-FILES: THE SEASONS

Season two: A change of pace

ALMOST AS SOON AS SEASON ONE WAS OVER, IT WAS TIME FOR ONE of Carter's bouts of reinvention – Fox had ordered another full season from Ten Thirteen Productions, and everything had to start all over again. As is the habit of many TV series – particularly American ones – Carter purposefully ended the first season on a cliffhanger, and one that was pure *X-Files* material. The files themselves had been shut, Mulder and Scully split apart, and the mysterious Deep Throat – played by Jerry Hardin – murdered.

Carter was quoted as saying "You can't go too far – but you've got to go further than just 'far enough'," referring to the need for a show like this to keep its viewers on their toes, and he'd done that all right. The killed-off Hardin was philosophical about taking Deep Throat's bullet, blaming it on his desire to see the character as a regular cast member being inconsistent with the show's general direction, and Carter agreed. The reasons for Deep Throat's death were simple – he had become far too commonplace, propping up Mulder's investigations in seven of the initial 24 shows. His death would serve to introduce a whole new plot thread too – one which would stretch throughout season two. Here, government cover-ups and bureaucratic shenanigans would come much more to the fore, with Mulder and Scully caught more clearly between "The Truth" and serving the desires of their FBI employers.

Thus, the intro to the second season led you straight into what Carter dubbed a "mini-series" of stories, with less outright weirdness, more conspiracy theory – but no easier answers than before. Different things were being investigated – UFO stuff seemed to crop up more often than normal – but though it was an interesting change of pace, critical response was mixed. Many compained that the show had turned inwards, spending too much time examining its characters and their motivations, and not enough investigating the mysterious happenings that had made the show such a hit in the first place.

What such critics may not have been aware of at the time, however, was that at least some of the new direction had been forced upon the programme makers by other circumstances... After all, Gillian Anderson had become pregnant – following her marriage to ex-production staffer Clyde Kotz – and, despite a succession of baggy coats and behind-a-desk shots, was becoming noticeably with child. A contingency plan had to be set in motion to explain Scully's temporary departure from the show – resulting in a plot arc that stretched through the shows "Duane Barry," "Ascension," "3" and "One Breath." First, Scully was kidnapped, then apparently abducted (in the flying-saucer sense). While her role was diminished for many of these shows, Anderson was only actually completely off-screen for the duration of "3" – two weeks after a C-section, and the birth of her daughter Piper, she was back to work. Her hospital scenes in "One Breath" were filmed at her actual post-natal bedside. As Gillian Anderson commented, "I actually fell asleep during some of those scenes – it was nice to only have to play being in a coma."

Still, reaction to the new style wasn't all bad, and the addition of "arc" stories – i.e. stories that are part of a continuing storyline, *à la Babylon 5* – was a very popular move. The good reaction to the tales of Scully's abduction, plus the return of the very popular Samantha Mulder character in the "Colony" and "End Game" two-parter, has

"From the first season, I think 'Beyond the Sea' was just wonderful... It worked for me on every level – it was extremely well done, and I was very proud of it."

Chris Carter

Gillian Anderson plays agent Mulder's partner, Scully, in *The X-Files...*

encouraged more of the same for future stories. "One of the most popular parts of the show," admits Carter, "are these 'Mulder & Scully vs the Government' stories. What does the Government know that they're not telling them? The search for Mulder's sister, too – these give the show a backbone, and creates a sort of anthological feel."

FOR THE SECOND SEASON, CARTER AGAIN DIRECTLY worked on many pivotal episodes, including "The Host," "F Emasculata" and the excellent Scully-focused "Irresistible" – a good vehicle for Anderson, who'd naturally been underused in recent stories. While Morgan, Wong (now co-executive producers) and Nutter worked on the opener "Little Green Men," and moody pieces like the vampire show "3," Carter wrote and directed the tense hostage drama "Duane Barry," which later netted three Golden Globe nominations, including best story.

Location and studio work showed more scope the second year too, as the concept of each episode being a "mini-movie" was expanded – scenes set in Puerto Rico, the New Mexico desert, the Arctic Circle (complete with nuclear submarine and over a hundred tons of real snow!) and the North Sea began a move to more exotic story locales, even if the crew never actually left Canada. "Everyone kept saying 'Let's do an episode in Hawaii!'" recalls Carter – but, of course, it wasn't that easy. Still, inventive use of CGI and composite imaging in "Anasazi" did very effectively create the illusion of Mulder's motorcycle ride through rocky deserts. "You won't figure out how we didn't leave Vancouver," he boasts.

The second season also found Carter team up with writing partners from unexpected corners. David E Kelleys of CBS' *Picket Fences* came up with the idea of meshing their two shows with a tale of cattle-town weirdness in Wisconsin. The *Picket Fences/X-Files* crossover was to have taken place between the stories "Away in the Manger" and "Red Museum," but sadly never came about, the villains this time being CBS, who refused to accept a Mulder cameo on their show on the grounds that *The X-Files* was a Friday night competitor. "We'd hoped it would be the first cross-network cross-pollination," says Carter, sadly.

Also new for season two was the fact that actor David Duchovny started to get heavily involved with the story ideas, particularly on shows like "Colony" and the season finale, "Anasazi." "David has a terrific story sense," notes Carter. "I love having him involved, and it makes a nice way for us to hang out and spend time together." The Carter and Duchovny stories both concentrated – perhaps unsurprisingly – on Mulder's family. Meanwhile, Gillian Anderson has expressed an interest, not in writing or directing, but in producing.

What, then, for Carter are the high points of season two?

"I really liked 'Duane Barry'," he replies, unsurprisingly, since that was the episode which won the Golden Globes, "while 'Sleepless', 'Irresistible,' the 'Colony'/'End Game' two-parter, 'Fresh Bones' and 'Humbug' were all good *X-Files* fare. The second season was filled with terrific shows."

The X-Files files

13 ODD THINGS YOU NEVER KNEW ABOUT LIFE FOR MULDER AND SCULLY.

Turn the lights on, Mulder! The FBI don't enter spooky buildings by torchlight!

1. Ten Thirteen, the *X-Files* production company, is named after *X-Files'* creator Chris Carter's birthdate.
2. When Mulder goes "B-Ba-Ba-Booey!" in **"Tooms"** this is an inside joke by Mulder showing that he listens to Howard Stern, the controversial New York radio DJ.
3. Telephone conversations are used as a plot device to lead into the next scene in almost every episode.
4. While the FBI don't officially give help to the programme, the cast and crew did once receive an invitation to tour the Hoover building.
5. Scully and Mulder use the wrong type of guns for FBI agents.
6. There were no writers' rules at the inception of the show – they've simply evolved as the series goes on.
7. The reason why so many *Twin Peaks* actors have appeared in *The X-Files* is due to their availability on the Pacific Northwest, rather than because of any crossover plans between the series.
8. The famous Jim Rose Circus appeared in the episode **"Humbug."**
9. Fox Television ordered the removal of "kinky" material from the episode **"3."**
10. David Duchovny hates the DDEB (David Duchovny Estrogen Brigade) on the Internet.
11. While Gillian Anderson thinks her fan club on the Net is, well, "funny."
12. Mulder's computer password is "TRUSTNO1."
13. *The X-Files* season two has been nominated for six Emmy awards, including best show, best cinematography and best writing.

THE X-FILES: THE SEASONS

Season three: What next?

IF SEASON ONE'S ENDING CAUSED CONSIDERABLE ripples within the ranks of *X-Files* devotees (the so-called "X-Philes"), season two's intense finale "Anasazi" created tidal waves. A true nail-biter, the "To be continued..." panel rolled over an ending that featured Mulder apparently blown up, along with a container-load of (allegedly) alien bodies, and a mysterious coded document capable of blowing the lid off the government's UFO cover-ups.

"It's certainly a cliffhanger, and there's a big dramatic question mark at the end of the show about what's happened to Fox Mulder," says Carter. His whammy season ender brought in some of his favourite supporting cast too, including the ubiquitous Cigarette Smoking Man, Byers, Langly & Frohike – the Lone Gunman team, Agent Alex Krycek (last seen in "Ascension"), director Skinner and Mulder's father. While the role of the elder Mulder (introduced in the show "Colony") was ably played by Peter Donat, he hadn't been Carter's first choice for the part. In homage to the inspirational *Kolchak: The Night Stalker,* he'd instead hoped to entice Carl Kolchack himself – actor Darren McGavin – to play the role. That he couldn't do so was a blow, but Carter is determined that he will appear in the series at some point in the future. "We've tried twice now and sadly he's been unavailable," he sighs. "But we'll continue to try when the right part comes about." Third time lucky, perhaps?

Gearing up for the third season's première in September this year, Carter is guarded about the upcoming stories, dropping tantalising hints about what viewers can look forward to. "We begin season three with a big two-parter, which is a continuation of the season two finale... The question (about Mulder's fate) is answered in episode one, but we don't stop there, and continue the story into episode two. It's another *X-Files* mini-series!"

And beyond that?

"For the rest of the year, we want to get back to what we do best, which is telling good, frightening stories, and telling them in ways that are unfamiliar. That said, we might surprise you with a sequel or two. We had great success with the sequel to the 'Squeeze' episode, 'Tooms,' so I think you might see a sequel to the episode 'Irresistible' somewhere along the line, and there are couple of others I'm considering doing too."

Carter plans to write three of the first five episodes, directing the fifth show as he did in

David Duchovny auditions for the new job in Take That. Or something...

"One of the most popular parts of the show are the 'Mulder & Scully vs the Government' stories. What does the Government know that they're not telling them?"

Chris Carter

season two with "Duane Barry." ("I'm superstitious!" he jokes.) The third year has introduced a nice-sized increase in budget too, which has to be good news, although it's still much lower than that enjoyed by other SF shows, including both *Lois & Clark* and *seaQuest DSV*. "Our budget has grown," admits Carter, "but it's a little bit more expensive to do the show now anyway, and it's not like they're throwing money at us. Effectively, we're still trying to do the same show for the same money. It just takes a few more people to do it."

For the new season, Carter will find his writing staff depleted, as Messers. Morgan and Wong depart to manage their own SF show for Ten Thirteen, *Space: Above and Beyond*, which is due to air alongside *The X-Files* in the Fall. While director Nutter will join them for the pilot episode, he'll continue to be "heavily involved" in *The X-Files*. To replace the departing writers, we can most likely expect to see more work from Howard Gordon and Alex Gansa, who wrote for the first season.

MARKETING THE X-FILES

LIKE ANY HOT ENTERTAINMENT PROPERTY, *THE X-Files* has created a wave of merchandising for devotees eager to proclaim their loyalty to the show – caps, T-shirts, jackets, trading cards, videos, calendars, and so on. Perhaps most interesting, though, are the licensed novels from HarperCollins and the comic book series from Topps Comics.

HarperCollins' licence is currently to produce three novels per year. 1995's first two have already been on sale for a couple of months. Charles Grant, the Nebula-award winning author of several "dark fantasy" novels, and editor of the long-running *Shadows* anthology series, penned the first two books. The first, *Goblins,* was about a military experiment to create a breed of "steath humans"; the second, *Whirlwind,* about a killer tornado. But critical response varied, some fans feeling Grant had missed out some of the essential characterisation important to *The X-Files*. Grant's third novel, *Hunter,* was due out in September, but a falling-out between the writer and the powers that be at Fox mean it will now never appear – at least, not without *The X-Files* tag being removed.

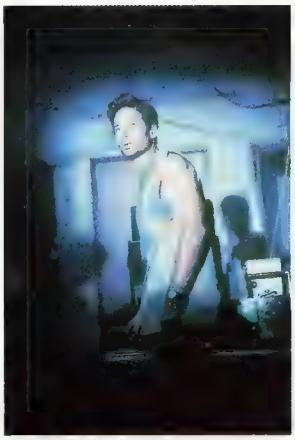
Chris Carter himself spent some time with Grant, "trying to explain who the characters were," but the situation apparently couldn't be resolved. To replace him, Carter auditioned several writers, before finally settling on Kevin J Anderson, perhaps best known as the author of the *Star Wars Jedi Academy* trilogy.

"I think Kevin's going to be great," says Carter. "He's hard-working, organised, and he's done quite thorough and elaborate outlines of the books – which is something Grant wouldn't do." Anderson's first book, *Ground Zero,* is now due out in December, and three more are planned for 1996. Other authors may start working on *X-Files* novels for HarperCollins too – horror/SF writer Whitley Strieber, author of the believe-it-or-not UFO tale *Communion* and its sequels, for example, is apparently interested, and would be a sure thing for creating alien abduction stories. A series of young adult novels, written by Les Martin, are also on the way, and will differ from the "adult" books in that they won't be original stories, but novelisations of TV episodes. The pilot episode (retitled "X Marks The Spot"), "Squeeze," "Darkness Falls," "A Fearful Symmetry" (retitled "Tiger, Tiger"), and "Humbug" will kick things off. A series guide is also planned, entitled *The X-Files Companion,* covering behind-the-scenes material and providing complete episode listings.

Meanwhile, at publishers Simon & Schuster, *The X-Files Book of the Unexplained* – a hardback coffee-table thing covering the "facts" behind the fictional tales in the series – is scheduled for an October release. The first volume will cover season one, with a planned second for mid-'96 covering year two. It's written by Jane Goldman – wife of TV chat-show host and genre buff Jonathan Ross, who recently appeared on BBC1's *Holiday* programme touring *Twin Peaks* and *X-Files* locations in the American Northwest and Vancouver.

Scullyisms & Mulder-talk

CHOICE REPARTEE FROM THE BEST OF SEASON ONE



"Looks like the housekeepers haven't been yet." Always a hoot, that Mulder...

"Deep Throat"
Mulder: "Tell me I'm crazy."
Scully: "You're crazy."

"Space"
Mulder: "Didn't you ever want to be an astronaut when you were growing up?"
Scully: "I must have missed that phase."

"Squeeze"
Scully: "Oh God, Mulder, it smells like... I think it's bile."
Mulder: "How can I get it off my fingers fast without betraying my cool exterior?"

"Fallen Angel"
Scene: Mulder's trashed hotel room.
Scully: "What's going on?"
Mulder: "Looks like the housekeepers haven't been here yet."

"Eve"
Scully: "That's over four litres of blood."
Mulder: "Could say the guy was running on empty."

"Shadows"
Mulder: "Hey, Scully, do you believe in the afterlife?"
Scully: "I'd settle for a life in this one."

"Ghost in the Machine"
Scully: "I forgot what it was like to spend a day in court."
Mulder: "That's one of the luxuries of hunting down aliens and genetic mutants. You rarely get to press charges."

OVER AT TOPPS, THE STORY HAS BEEN EVEN MORE successful, with the comic's publishing history a virtual mirror of the TV series' success. The print-run for the first few issues was low, resulting in total sell-outs – and incredible rarity. These days, the title's much easier to get hold of, but early issues will still set you back around $40 a copy. Writer Stephan Petrucha (formerly of the *Duckman* comics, would you believe?) has done well over the first eight or so issues, hitting only a few bum notes to date, while artist Charles Adlard (ex of *The Judge Dredd Megazine* and *Mars Attacks!* series) keeps the essential atmospheric moodiness of the show's visuals, although there have been complaints that his versions of Mulder and Scully look little like Duchovny and Anderson. Topps' successful comics – which Carter describes as "fun" – will be collected into graphic novels in the near future, while a US newsstand-only digest version, and repacked UK reprints from Manga Publishing, are now on sale.

THE FUTURE'S OUT THERE, SOMEWHERE...

AS FAR BACK AS THE MIDDLE OF 1994, THERE'S BEEN loose talk and scuttlebutt surfacing on *X-Files* Internet sites and in SF media magazines that Fox had approached Carter to come up with an *X-Files* spin-off series. Clearly, the bosses at 20th Century had seen the show's ballistic take-off as a sign of sustainable (and bankable) interest, and one only has to look to Paramount's multiple *Star Trek* franchises to see the benefits of the spin-off concept – "cult" TV fans are noted for their dedicated viewing habits. With this

"I think Kevin J Anderson, author of the Star Wars Jedi Academy trilogy, is going to be great. He's hard-working, organised, and he's done thorough outlines of the books."

Chris Carter on the new author of *The X-Files* novels

Gillian Anderson was absent for some of season two. In the new shows, however, she's back...

There *will* be an *X-Files* movie. There *may* be a spin-off TV show. We know. Chris Carter told us...

in mind, lots of potential ideas were bandied around. While it was always pretty certain we wouldn't see "Deep Throat: The Early Years," there was much talk of a Lone Gunman show – featuring Mulder's erstwhile conspiracy hunter buddies – and, perhaps, most plausibly, a vampire series. The latter rumour grew out of the episode "3," wherein Mulder investigates a series of "trinity killings" perpetrated by apparent vampiric murderers. The show's close left three "bad" vampires and one "good" one running around free, which begs the question – What's happened to them? Other rumours centre around something called "The Y-Files," which, it was suggested, would be similar to *The X-Files,* but focus on an international team of investigators.

Carter's comments cut right through the rumours.

"There was never, ever an idea to spin-off the vampire episode," he says, bluntly. "The spin-off would be from *The X-Files* generally, not just from one, specific show. It's not in the works right now, but only because I don't have any time to do it. That said, I certainly have a lot of ideas of how to do, if not a spin-off, then certainly a companion piece for *The X-Files*."

Beyond this, however, he won't be drawn – "It's still rattling around my head" – other than to say that the new work would definitely take the form of another on-going series, rather than a TV movie, special or mini-series. And while it seems Fox would be willing to let Carter helm the new show, his commitment to *The X-Files* means he won't be leaving anytime soon, so things are on hold for the time being...

What, then, of the other big fan rumour – the one that takes Mulder and Scully from the small screen to the big one for a full-scale *X-Files* movie? Surely, that's got to be in the works?

"It's not a rumour," Carter smiles. "It's actually moving forward – it's just a matter of when it will be written, when the actors are available, and when we can shoot it." One big problem is persuading Duchovny and Anderson to surrender their already-scant off-air work time to a film project – commit to a film, and it would essentially mean them working on *The X-Files* all year round. Gillian Anderson has certainly made clear her preference would be to do any features *after* the show's stopped running on TV, in much the same way as happened with *Star Trek: The Next Generation.* If that remains the case, with both stars contracted for five years, we can only expect to see *X-Files: The Motion Picture* in 1998, at the earliest.

In the meantime, the series has certainly proved it has "legs," and has every sign it will run and run, becoming a genre TV icon in much the same way *Star Trek* did in the '60s. Not that Carter dares look *too* far into the future.

"I can't even see a year ahead," he muses, "But it would be wonderful to put down your bit of television history." Can he see it lasting like *Star Trek?* "They'd be wheeling me around in in a wheelchair..." he laughs. That said, he seems confident – as we are – that "the truth" will be out there for quite some time to come...

Season two of The X-Files *begins on BBC 2 this Autumn. Season three begins on US TV at around the same time, and should run on Sky next year. Fox Video's release of the rest of season one on video – four tapes , are already available – recommences in November.*

"It's moving forward – it's just a matter of when it will be written, when the actors are available, and when we can shoot it."

Chris Carter on the film version of *The X-Files*

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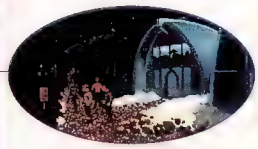

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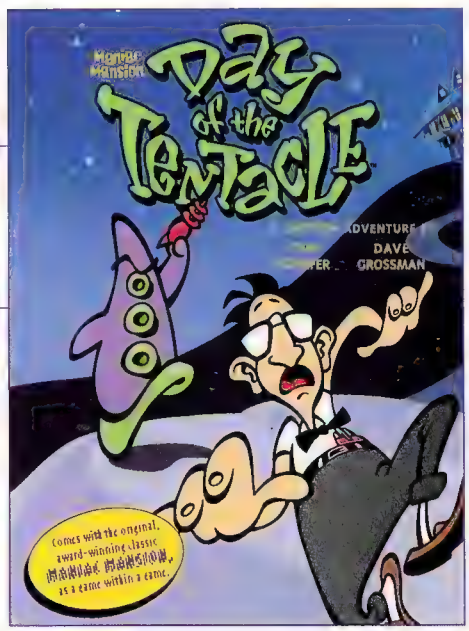
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Babylon 5, The Guyver, and 200-foot alligators...

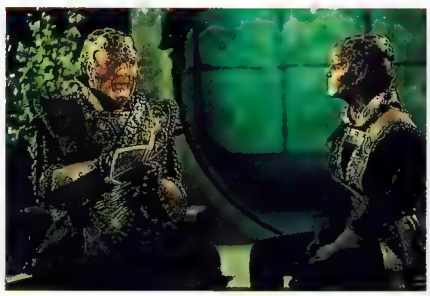
"IN THE INTEREST OF ACCURACY"

Dear SFX,
First, let me congratulate your mag for jumping into the genre with both feet! SFX is informative, in-depth, but still with some humour and attitude. You've had excellent coverage and treatment of the subjects so far, and gorgeous graphics. Your layout and content is almost too much to get to grips with – and that's not a complaint!

In the interests of accuracy, however, I'd like to point out a few things about the *Babylon* 5 UK Fan Club. Babcom '95 was *not* Britain's first ever *B5* convention – the *B5* UK FC organised Sigma 957 on 26 February this year at London's ICA. Though we had no guest, except a 50-minute Harlan Ellison talk on video, the event was fully subscribed by return of post after its announcement in issue three of our newsletter, *The 5 Times!* By the way, I'm not trying to get "one up" on Stargazer here – it's always great to see *B5* and related events covered in the media. We're also helping Wolf 359 to organise The Gathering convention this September, which is now fully subscribed.

Be seeing you...

Des Watkins
London



***Babylon 5* has many supporters – not least the *Babylon 5* UK Fan Club, who organised the first *B5* event in the UK.**

"THE EMPEROR HAS NO CLOTHES ON!"

Dear SFX,
It was really quite exciting to hear that a magazine devoted to SF was imminent. But what a disappointment. Two issues so far, and the message is this: SF is a glossy, full-colour product. Don't think, just consume, consume, consume. It's a consumer magazine with the obligatory scoring system to help you select the best SF videos to buy, which SF films to see, and which SF books to be seen with.

Where is the analysis? Where is the debate on SF itself? It's not about SF at all. It's about product that just happens to be SF, and it's not enough.

It should be easy to write about SF, but – somehow – SFX avoids the issue. SF analyses, deconstructs, parodies, quantifies, discomforts. *Star Trek* comforts. The arrival of SFX, and the growing popularity of utter shit like *Star Trek: TNG* or *Babylon 5* makes me wonder whether it's all part of a larger conspiracy to make us forget about real SF – you know, that liberating, dangerous, world-changing stuff you used to read when you were younger. Stuff that made you think. Have you any idea how guilty I feel about saying that *Babylon 5* is shit in print? The peer pressure to conform and join in the chorus singing its praises is immense! But I will say it anyway: The Emperor has no clothes on!

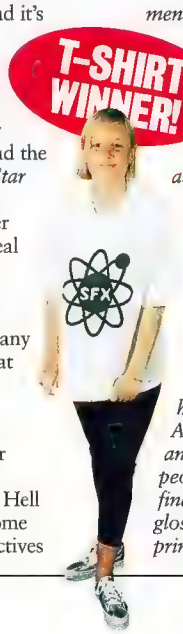
Please replace the deeply sad TV Hell articles (e.g. *Wonder Woman)* with some considered pieces on SF (e.g. retrospectives on classic SF novels or authors). I want to see SFX get to grips with SF as a genre as well as the products it generates. Face up to it. Get stuck in.

Yours faithfully,

Peter Crump
Ripon

Actually, the stuff we read when we *were younger was* X-Men *comics and* Doctor Who *novels, which only* later on *introduced us to SF, and the "liberating, world-changing stuff" we read, watch and listen to now. We take your point, Peter – to an extent. There's nothing wrong with debate on SF, or analysis, deconstruction, or any of the other things you mentioned. However, the place for them – in the main – is not SFX. If you want analysis of SF as a genre, we suggest you subscribe to the excellent journal* Foundation, *or read any of a million SF fanzines which debate this topic endlessly. Instead, SFX is about the mainstream of science fiction, it's about getting as many people involved in the genre as possible – and it's about stuff that's fun. Remember, good SF, be it* Ringworld *or* RoboCop, *is enjoyable and/or exciting and/or thrilling, as well as thought-provoking and imaginative.*

Finally, SFX has no cast-in-stone editorial policy (one member of staff hates B5 *as much as you do, for instance). As far as we're concerned, pretty much anything liked by a a large enough group of people is worth covering. Hope you'd don't find the SFX T-shirt you've just won too glossy, full colour a product for you – we did print it in simple black-and-white!*



"STANLEY KUBRICK'S BUTT"

Dear SFX,
A Clockwork Orange may be a classic – in fact, it darn well *is* a classic – but if that's the case, why the hell can't we see it legally today, in the supposedly more liberal '90s?

I've been meaning to start a protest to get *A Clockwork Orange* released in the UK, and I think I'm going to need a little help. You all seem like jolly nice people in the SFX offices, so could you please go kick Stanley Kubrick's butt and inform the poor wee chappie that in these days of Quentin Tarantino *et al,* nobody's inclined to want to murder him just for creating an amazing piece of cinematic art with a minimal bodycount. It's probably the best novel-to-film translation I've ever seen.

Is this all some weird publicity stunt or what? To say the very least, I'm mighty peeved

Many continue to labour under the misapprehension that *A Clockwork Orange* has been "banned" by the BBFC...

that I can't watch the damn thing properly. (Hope you sell loads and loads.)

Katie of Orange
London

P.S. Leeds University? *Really?*

Let's sort this out once and for all. A Clockwork Orange *was submitted to the BBFC years ago, and they asked for certain cuts before they would allow the film to be released. Kubrick wasn't prepared to allow the cuts, so it wasn't released. Warner Brothers can resubmit it to the BBFC at any time, and it will be reconsidered, but there is absolutely nothing that can be done until then.*

It has certainly never been "banned" as many people believe. Given that numerous films previously denied video certification have been released in recent years (e.g. Lucio Fulci's The House by the Cemetery), A Clockwork Orange *certainly stands a chance of getting through. But if you want to see it legally, Warners are the people to badger. As for the location, Leeds Uni students say it was filmed there, but Uxbridge Uni have also now put in a claim. Anyone else?*

"A 200 FOOT ALLIGATOR"

Dear SFX,
Just finished your magazine and I have to say congratulations. Finally, a really good sci-fi mag that is actually balanced.

The main reason I am writing is in connection with *seaQuest DSV*. Here in Ireland we get many US programmes before the UK, and at the time of writing (late June) we are well over halfway through DSV's second season and it's just fantastic – even better than *Star Trek* in some episodes. Last week's show had a 200 foot alligator almost matching *Jurassic Park* in special effects!

So to those who doubt – forget the first season ever happened, catch the first show of the new season and watch mutating "Dags," a telepathic doctor (not original, but it works), beautiful people and stunning new special effects. Above all, keep an open mind, and hopefully this won't be the last series.

NTT World
Ireland

"A FEW ADDRESSES"

Dear SFX,
I have just completed a year's course in TV, film and theatre make-up and special effects, and I need your help. After many trips to my local library I could only find out a few addresses of film-makers that I could write to. As an avid reader of your fine magazine, I was hoping you could send me a list of all the people or companies that you know that could use the services of a qualified make-up artist.

I thank you in advance for your help, and maybe one day you'll be interviewing me! (Fingers crossed!)

Thanks again,

Shaun Amey
Peterborough

This is one of several letters we've received asking about in-roads into the fx/make-up profession. We're sorry, but we can't send out contact addresses. They are all listed in the relevant trade mags, and if you're not reading them, you shouldn't really be trying to get into the industry. Similarly, we can't put prospective writers in touch with film companies or publishers. Sorry, folks.

SFXCELLENT! Best Bit of Science Fiction Ever

This month's nomination for the Best Bit Of Science Fiction Ever is from Alan Holloway of Bristol. Remember, we want to hear what bit of SF *you* rate – be it a book, a film, a TV show, a comic or whatever – and why. There's a T-shirt in it for any we use... And please keep your outpourings short and sweet.

***The Door Into Summer* by Robert A Heinlein**

"Robert Anson Heinlein is generally acknowledged as *the* master of science fiction, up there with Asimov as a true visionary. He gave us *Stranger in a Strange Land*, a book that can change the way you look at life, but my favourite will always be *The Door Into Summer*.

"It tells the story of Daniel Boone Davis and his ever present companion Pete, one of the feline variety. Dan is a brilliant inventor, but when he is double-crossed by his business partner and the girl he thought loved him, he and Pete take the 'Long Sleep' until the year 2000, where he hopes he can rebuild his life.

But in the future he eventually gets a job in a company that's making gadgets similar to those he had been working on in the past, and when he finds that all the patents have been attributed to himself, he knows he has to find a way back in order to find out what the hell's going on. But surely time travel is impossible?

"I can't pick out a particular passage or element – as far as I'm concerned, the *entire book* is the Best Bit Of Science Fiction Ever – but although it isn't widely published now, if you ever see a copy, snap it up and enjoy..."

"PYJAMAS & FLUFFY BLUE SLIPPERS"

Dear SFX,
For anyone interested in *The Guyver: Dark Hero*, it would appear that the film is a sequel to *Mutronics*, a 1990 straight-to-video flop starring Mark Hamill as a CIA agent who briefly runs around in pyjamas and fluffy blue slippers before transforming into a giant lobster.

Yours,

Jo Marvin
Bromley

Mutronics: The Movie *is, indeed, the UK title of the first* Guyver *film. Peter Cullen of* Red Leopard *fanzine says that* Dark Hero *is "much darker in tone and quite gory."*

"EMBARRASSED TO PIECES"

Dear SFX
What can I say? I'm embarrassed to pieces. Please pass on my thanks to Catie for the fine words and Rob for the piccies.

Best wishes with the great mag,

Jeff Noon
Manchester

Editor's note: For those poor souls who missed our early issues, we've set up a back issues department. *Turn to page 96 for details.*

STOP ME AND BUY ONE!

From the next issue of SFX (yeah, I know we said *this* issue, but we goofed...), we'll be running FREE Reader Ads. If you want to buy, sell, or whatever, please fill in the form below, remembering to tick the relevant box, and send it to us at: Reader Ads, SFX, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, Avon BA1 2BW.

Please keep your entries reasonably brief, and write legibly so we don't end up laughing at the moon when it comes to typing them in!

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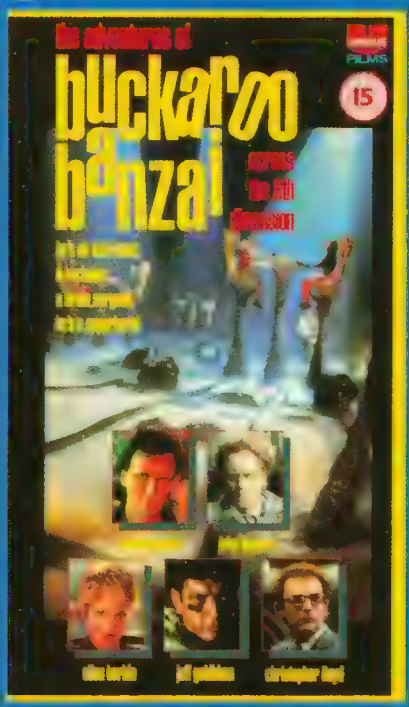

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David Langford

Fandom As She Is Spoke

What is the secret language of SF fandom? Newspaper journalists who try to penetrate the mysteries usually end up sounding faintly silly...

This, I fear, is because SF fans have prejudiced views, based on the suspicion that no matter how sympathetic the journalist may be when told about the subtle literary qualities of Gene Wolfe or the current crisis in SF publishing, the resulting story will invariably begin with something like: "Nerds and geeks were out in force when I beamed down from my UFO to last weekend's sci-fi anorakfest on Planet Birmingham."

That's our English language: Time and again, a reporter pulls on his anorak, an entirely sensible garment well suited to our dismal climate, and goes off to write a story sneering at people suspected of wearing said clothing...

We're talking sociolinguistic nuances here. The reporter uses "anorak" in a special sense. SF people do just this with "sci-fi," pronouncing it in tones of heavy irony to describe bad TV or movie SF. The actual term was coined long ago by Forrest J Ackerman, to echo "hi-fi."

Unfortunately, Ackerman, although the nicest of men, was associated for many years with fearful B-movie material thanks to his magazine *Famous Monsters of Filmland* – and somehow it all rubbed off on his beloved creation "sci-fi."

But the term got loose from the laboratory, like Frankenstein's creature, and is now used without irony by outsiders... While insiders found they needed a word for terrible SF that they actually rather liked, and came up with the variation "skiffy."

A problem for many researchers eager to mock is that most SF fan language is dull and functional. "Fanzine" is short for "fan magazine" – and, yes, that came from SF, although rock and football fans soon followed suit; and some people have so forgotten its roots they pronounce it as in Auld Fan Syne. Then there's con for SF convention, APA for Amateur Press Association, GoH for guest of honour (at conventions)... There's nothing to match the poetic metaphors of drug culture, probably because SF fandom has little to hide. You rarely get chucked into prison for pushing novels, even if they're by Terry Brooks or Piers Anthony.

Rob Scott

One word in particular, "gafiate," has a mildly interesting history. GAFIA was coined back in the '30s as an acronym for Getting Away From It All – escaping from the mundane world into SF fan activities (alias "fanac," but luckily you don't hear that one much these days). The verb "gafiate" naturally followed, but eventually switched polarity and came to mean getting away from fandom.

All these decades of fan doings have left a terrible legacy of fannish terms invented as in-jokes, and recorded by would-be historians. These dread words are now used only when incautious reporters at conventions betray themselves by going on about sci-fi and anoraks...

So the journalist's leg is pulled mercilessly with tales of how fans call their women "femmefans" (dating back years to when a female fan was a rare phenomenon in the SF world), feast on "blog" and "crottled greeps" (imaginary rotgut drink and unsavoury viands invented as a '50s British jape), worship embarrassing deities like "Ghu, FooFoo" and "Roscoe" (the Americans can take the blame for all that), and spell certain words with the special fannish H as in "bheer" or "Ghod" (this hideous whimsy is happily long extinct except – strangely – in Sweden).

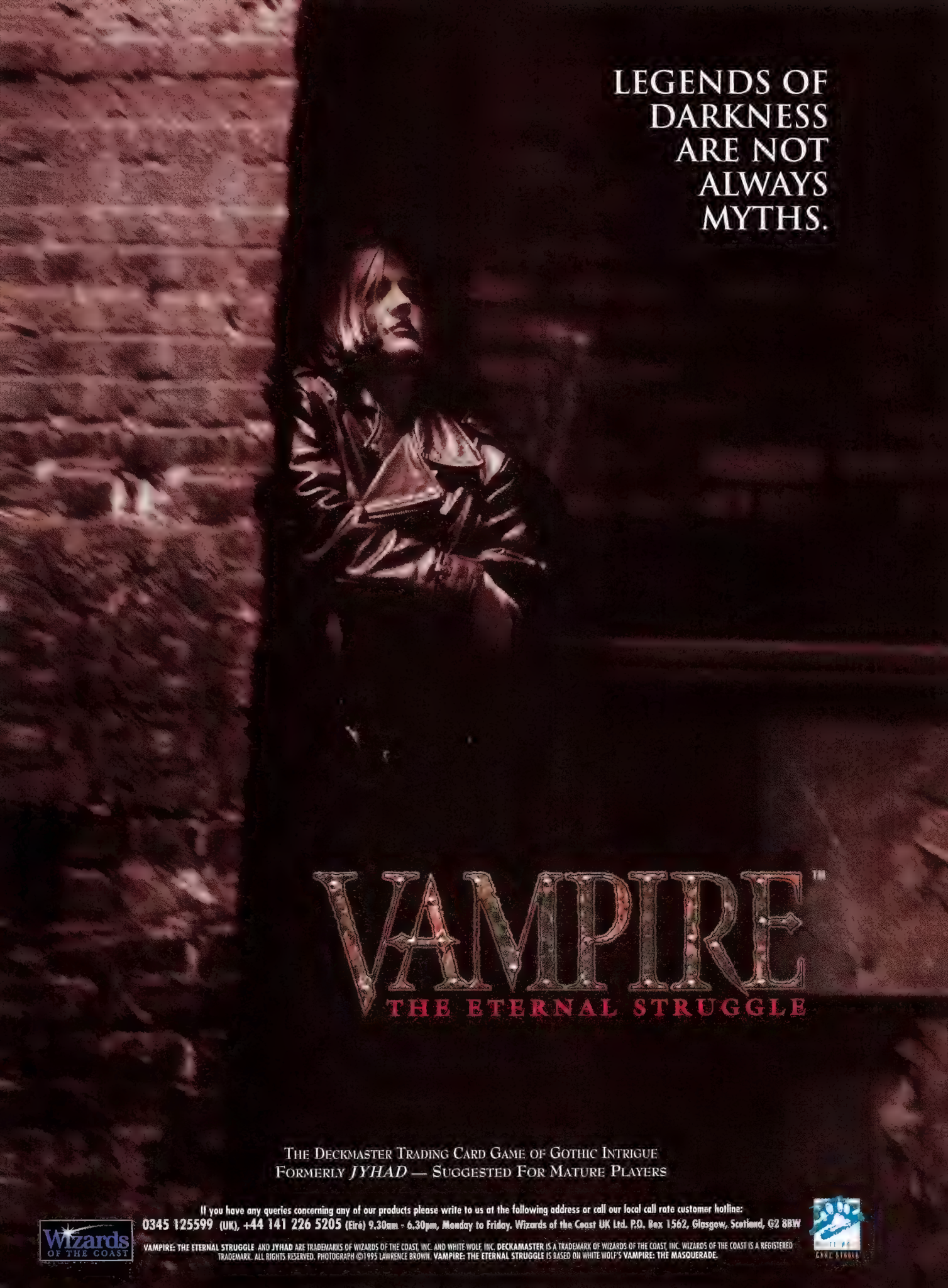
Of course, it all ends in tears... Whether or not the reporter takes such nonsense seriously, it's invariably seen as a wonderful opportunity to portray the fans as loonies wearing space-anoraks who babble in tongues. Staring aghast at the resulting write-up, the hungover news sources wail, "The bastard! We were only joking, for God's sake!"

Yes, you should believe nothing you hear about fanspeak, not even from me. My (and others') dislike of "sci-fi" is *still* hotly contested by its inventor Forrest J Ackerman, who argues that the initials "SF" are too easily confused with abbreviations for Finland or a certain US city...

Meanwhile my favourite expert on Eastern Europe explains that "sci-fi" is actually the really cool thing to call SF in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Moreover, in Romania it's best to avoid the Russian-derived word "stiintifico-fantastica" – this is reckoned to brand you as an old-line communist. So people say "SF" instead... Which in Romania is pronounced, roughly, "sci-fi." My brain hurts...

"My dislike of the term 'sci-fi' is still hotly contested by its inventor Forrest J Ackerman, who staunchly argues that the initials 'SF' are too easily confused with abbreviations for Finland or a certain US city..."

SF author David Langford has been nominated for the inevitable Hugo this year. We'll tell you if he won it next ish.



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John Grant

Scribble, Scribble, Scribble

It was William Henry, Duke of Gloucester (1743-1805), who remarked to Edward Gibbon, hard at work on the next volume of *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire:* "Another damned, thick, square book! Always scribble, scribble, scribble. Eh, Mr Gibbon?" The comment has been relished as a philistinism ever since.

And 1993 saw the publication of another damned, thick, square book: The second edition of *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, edited by John Clute and Peter Nicholls, with Brian Stableford as Contributing Editor and yours truly as Technical Editor. The book received the Hugo, the Locus Award, the Eastercon Award and the first BSFA Special Award to be handed down for 17 years, and was indeed thick – 1.4 million words thick, in fact.

The story of how the book came into existence is an interesting one. It started way back in 1988 when Justin Knowles – head of the Justin Knowles Publishing Group – rang me to ask if I'd be interested in putting together an SF encyclopedia. I replied that there would be little point in doing so unless we were to match *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (1979), edited by Peter Nicholls; would it not make more sense if I tried to contact Nicholls (who lives in Australia) or his Associate Editor, Clute, to see if they might wish to compile a second edition? A few months later, I bumped into Clute and suggested that, if he wanted, he might get in touch with Knowles.

Things then started happening with devastating speed. Knowles and his Chief Editor, Lydia Darbyshire, were entranced by the project, and planned, through the use of copious illustration, to make it even bigger than planned. Somewhere amidst the frenzy, I became the book's Project Editor (basically the nuts and bolts man), which meant a rapid readjustment of my schedule for the next year or two. In early 1990, after long dickering, Nicholls and Clute were able to buy back publishing rights in the first edition from Roxby Press, so they (and Stableford, who came on board around this time) didn't have to write the new *Encyclopedia* from scratch; a company had already been commissioned to type the entire first edition onto disc for use as a base text.

© Rob Scott

And then, disaster struck. Knowles was forced out of business. Suddenly, we no longer had a project.

Or did we? By now, Knowles had talked with John Jarrold at the publisher Macdonalds, and Jarrold was keen to publish the book. He stepped in promptly, bought up the project, and we were soon back on course...

Until, that is, Robert Maxwell, owner of Macdonalds, went over the side of his yacht. For several months, we had no idea whether the half-finished book was ever going to see the light of day. It seemed to be jinxed. Jarrold departed to Legend, where he is still Editor. Then, finally, Macdonalds was bought up by the US company Little, Brown, and the project was definitely back on-stream.

"For several months, we had no idea whether the half-finished book was ever going to see the light of day. It seemed to be jinxed... Then, finally, US company Little, Brown bought us up and the project was back on..."

The delay had one unforeseen consequence. In the interim (during which I was able to write the second edition of my own *Encyclopedia of Walt Disney's Animated Characters)*, the book, like Topsy, had expanded enormously. Originally commissioned at about 800,000 words, it was now heading towards the one million plus mark. Fortunately, Little, Brown kept faith – probably because by now the *Encyclopedia* had become something of an unstoppable juggernaut – and slapped our wrists only gently when finally we delivered, months late, our 1.4 million word opus.

The rest was relatively plain sailing, except for some technical horrors during the typesetting; luckily, Lydia Darbyshire, now a freelancer, was able to take on the proof-reading.

But the reason I've been thinking a lot about the Duke of Gloucester recently has mainly been prompted by the fact that now – rather foolishly – I'm doing the same kind of work all over again! Clute and I, assisted by David Langford, Roz Kaveney and Gary Westfahl, are well into *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, due to be delivered in three months' time to Little, Brown. This is going to be the Summer of Hell.

So why are we doing it? Hardly for the money, because there's not enough of it. Hardly for pleasure, because putting together books of this kind is nightmarishly difficult. Are we dedicated scholars, or proselytising crusaders? Or are we just masochists?

I think it's probably because, like Gibbon, we have this urge to scribble, scribble, scribble...

John Grant is a prolific fantasy author, and a glutton for punishment.

As *Species* starts, the alien – the thing we're all meant to be scared of – takes the form of this sweet little girl. Something's sure to go wrong – and soon does (top right).

girl trouble

MORE THAN 15 YEARS AFTER RIDLEY SCOTT'S ALIEN, ROGER DONALDSON'S SPECIES FINDS A SIMILAR FORMULA FOR SUCCESS. **DAVE HUGHES** AND **JOE NAZZARO** TALK TO THE PEOPLE WHO MADE IT HAPPEN.

In 1974, the world's largest radio telescope – at Arecibo, Puerto Rico – sent a message to the farthest reaches of the cosmos, informing anyone who cared to listen of the existence and nature of human life. According to the US government, it has yet to receive a reply. But what if, eh? That's the starting point for *Species*, the new SF/horror film – already a major hit in the US, and due out in the UK this September – that takes something of the look and feel of Ridley Scott's classic *Alien*, but relocates it to present day Earth. It's a concept that's clearly struck a nerve in the States – the movie "only" cost £30 million to make, but at press time had generated something like $50 million at the box office, after a less-than-endangered $17 million opening. The creators of much more expensive productions must be gnashing their teeth in envy...

Set in present-day Los Angeles, director Roger Donaldson's new film grew from an intriguing, Crichton-esque premise: If scientists received a sequence of DNA from outer space, could they resist growing it? In *Species*, predictably enough, they can't – and this time their curiosity not only kills the cat, but threatens to destroy the rest of mankind too.

"At the beginning, Sil is quite naïve, but she learns very quickly about the world and how to navigate through it."

Natasha Henstridge, the actress who plays Sil

SPECIES' ROLLERCOASTER PLOT IS FAIRLY SIMPLE. AT FIRST, THE NEW lifeform – codenamed "Sil" – looks innocent enough: A combination of extra-terrestrial DNA and the human genome, it has the physical characteristics of a normal, healthy, little girl, albeit with an accelerated growth rate that makes it mature from ovum to teenager in a matter of weeks. But when the creature begins to mutate beyond its human characteristics, the scientists who grew it – led by Xavier Fitch (Oscar-winner Ben Kingsley) – decide to terminate the experiment. Sil, however, proves a little difficult to kill, breaking out of her laboratory home and catching a train to downtown LA, viciously killing a transient and a train conductor *en route*, and maturing further into a stunningly beautiful adult female on a mission from God knows where. What we do know is that mating, procreating, and annihilating come into it somewhere...

Fitch, meanwhile, assembles an eclectic group of experts with whom he hopes to capture and kill this mutant test-tube babe: Preston "Press" Lennox, an unofficial Army operative specialising in search-and-destroy missions (played by Michael Madsen, who starred in Donaldson's remake of *The Getaway)*, British anthropologist Stephen Arden (Alfred Molina), empath Dan Smithson (Forest Whitaker) and molecular biologist Laura Baker (Marg Helgenberger, recently seen becoming an alien in *The Tommyknockers* mini-series).

Dennis Feldman, who wrote the original script, says that the idea arose from a pronouncement by SF godfather Arthur C Clarke that the distances between stars are so great that the chances of the Earth ever receiving visitors from outer space are too remote even to contemplate. "I hypothesized that contact could more likely be made via information," he remembers. "There could be speed-of-light communications that would include instructions to build something that would be virtually a message itself." Rather than a mechanical creation, however, humanity's own advances in genetics might mean that the "message" could be a new sequence of DNA, together with friendly instructions on how to combine it with our own.

With his script completed, optioned by Frank Mancuso Jr – whose credits include the last six *Friday the 13th* movies, and the thriller *Internal Affairs* – and put into production by MGM studios, a director needed to be found. Roger Donaldson, the Australian-born director of *No Way Out* and *The Bounty* then came aboard – "I've always loved science fiction," he says, "I loved *Alien*" – and the chance to do something no *Alien* movie had yet done, bring the action to Earth, quickly started to come together.

TALKING ABOUT *SPECIES*, THERE'S NO WAY YOU CAN AVOID THE *ALIEN* comparisons – it's been a major influence all the way along the line,

All pictures © Paramount Pictures

Ben Kingsley (centre) and Michael Madsen (behind) lead the team tracking the deadly Sil.

although it's the distinctive work of Swiss artist HR Giger that gives the picture the greatest sense of *déjà vu*. It was, after all, Giger who brought the various forms of Ridley Scott's original Alien to terrifying and utterly plausible life some 15 years earlier. By all accounts, MGM positively encouraged this comparison, considering a Giger-designed monster to be a sure-fire way to spark audience excitement...

"We wanted her to be scary," Mancuso explains, "but, at the same time, have a sensuality that isn't lost when she appears as the creature. There needed to be a constant level of grace and elegance to the character, and HR Giger was the only person we could think of who could accomplish this." Having piqued the artist's interest by sending him the script, Mancuso Jr. and Donaldson flew to Zurich to meet him, outlining their ideas for Sil's various monstrous manifestations and assuring him that they would do their utmost to see that his designs were rendered faithfully on screen. This unenviable task was given to four-time Academy Award winning visual effects supervisor Richard Edlund – whose Boss Film Studios had been somewhat less than successful in bringing Giger's creature designs to life in *Alien*³ – and special effects, make-up and animatronics expert Steve Johnson, who had had much the same story with regard to *Poltergeist* 2, which also implemented some of Giger's distinctive handiwork. At the time that'd been filmed, technology had simply proved insufficient to accurately represent Giger's ethereal and ectoplasmic designs. "But things have changed," claims Edlund. "With today's equipment and technology, we can do things we couldn't have dreamed of two years ago. It's been like building a new violin, and learning to play it."

NOT THAT THE SPECIAL EFFECTS WERE DIRECTOR DONALDSON'S ONLY – or even primary – concern. "What appealed to me," says Donaldson, "was putting together a sort of ensemble cast. My philosophy has always been to work with the best actors you can find. If they're convincing, it helps sell your piece – especially when it's pure fantasy." Indeed, looking at the finished film, it's hard to imagine a more eclectic and varied team than the one eventually put together by Donaldson: Whitaker's

"We wanted Sil to be scary, but at the same time have a sensuality that isn't lost when she appears as the creature. There needed to be a constant level of grace and elegance to the character."

Frank Mancuso Jr, producer

"i was very interested in making a lady version of the alien..."

...SAYS HR GIGER, AND NOW HE'S MANAGED IT AT LAST. YOU'VE GOT TO FEEL SORRY FOR THE MAN, THOUGH. FOLLOWING HIS MUCH PUBLICISED OSCAR FOR ALIEN, EVERYONE KNOWS WHO GIGER IS AND RECOGNISES HIS TALENT – YET, WRITES **DAVE HUGHES**, THE SWISS SURREALIST HAS HAD REAL DIFFICULTY FINDING NEW FILM PROJECTS BIG ENOUGH, AND SPECIAL EFFECTS TEAMS GOOD ENOUGH, TO DO HIS DESIGNS JUSTICE...

The beginning is history. Having enjoyed some two decades as one of Europe's most inspired artists since Dali, Hansruedi Giger – more commonly known by his initials "HR" – was approached by a promising young director to provide some appropriately unearthly visuals for an SF/horror movie he was planning. The director's name: Ridley Scott. The project: A Dan O'Bannon script called "They Bite!"

The result was arguably the greatest monster to originate in movies in 100 years of the medium. That the film – now retitled *Alien* – would become a massive hit on its release in 1979, and spawn one of the most successful movie franchises of all time, should have surprised no-one. That the Oscar-winning Giger should receive such shabby treatment by the film world ever after, however, is virtually cause for scandal...

Giger's most recent bone of contention is with *Batman Forever*, for which he produced a number of Batmobile blueprints – winged and skeletal, just like the final Barbara Ling design – in his familiar, bio-mechanical style, only to never hear from Warner Bros again. "I did about 15 designs," he laments, "but I never got any money and [although director Joel] Schumacher told me he would visit, he never came."

There have been plenty of other disappointments too. Giger's been

HR Giger's vision of a female alien is at its most effective when seen barely lit, like this.

Giger (centre) has been badly treated by Hollywood – *Species* breaks the mould.

involved in some major projects – *Poltergeist 2* and *Alien³* spring to mind – but none have used his designs to best effect, as well as a dozen unproduced disappointments like *Dead Star, The Tourist* and *The Train*. Fortunately, he's a patient man, and at last his persistence has been rewarded. Like *Alien, Species* is a project that really gives him a chance to shine...

For Giger, *Species* began in 1993, when director Roger Donaldson and producer Frank Mancuso Jr flew to Switzerland to speak with the artist personally and invite him to contribute creature designs to a new SF thriller they were planning for MGM. Speaking from his home in Chur, Switzerland, in his slow, monotonous accent, Giger recalls that he was initially doubtful about the project, mainly because of Donaldson's inexperience with the genre. "He never made a science fiction film," he remembers, "so I was a little concerned, but Mancuso has the experience – he made all those *Friday the 13th* films, and a lot of other good movies – and we had a very good exchange of ideas."

Giger, who recently turned 55, was particularly attracted by the idea of Sil, the beautiful but deadly female alien. Looking at Giger's 30-year body of work, it's easy to see why. Sil is closer to the artist's regular themes – alien women, often fused with machinery – than even his work for *Alien*.

"I was very interested in making a lady version of the Alien," he explains. "But not an ugly thing, with slime and things like that, and not somebody in a rubber suit." He liked the idea of having Sil rendered using a combination of model-making, puppetry and computer generated images (CGI). "There is a man in a suit [actually a woman, Olympic gold medallist Dana Hee] for the underwater scenes, but they work with computers and models and then blend it all together."

I next spoke to Giger during the production of *Species,* when his main worry was that an expensive dream sequence, involving a ghost train with a death's head engine – a design originally dreamed up for Alexandro Santa Sangre Jodorwsky's unproduced version of *Dune,* and later revived to act as the basis for another unmade SF project, Carolco's *The Train* – would not make it to the finished film.

"I've worked on this train," he told me, "and if they do not use it I will be very depressed and will have lost a lot of money." This is typical of Giger's *modus operandum* – to have such a vivid conceptualisation of how a film should look that he cannot help but deliver far more than is required, often using up his fee in building things that are rarely, if ever, used in the final cut. "I am always so enthusiastic that I don't wait until the contracts are done," he explains. "It was like this for *Alien³* and the *Batman Forever* car, but I have to do it when I have the spark, otherwise I will lose interest."

For once, Giger needn't have worried – although brief, rough around the edges and slightly incongruous, the mechanical ghost train dream sequence has made it to the final cut – "It is a little short, but it is there," Giger told me more recently, clearly delighted – and, what's more, the artist has been given a full "conceived, designed and fabricated by" credit for the train, to complement his main "Sil designed by HR Giger" credit and, quite possibly, another Oscar nomination, this time to be fought out with Barbara Ling *(Batman Forever),* Nigel Phelps *(Judge Dredd)* and the team behind *Waterworld.*

Having previously worked on a movie as good as *Alien,* one burning question remains: What does Giger think of *Species* himself?

"I think Donaldson made it very good," he says, "until the last eight or ten minutes, then it isn't so good." Yet again, he observes, film-makers see fire as being the only way out of a science fiction movie. "Americans like fire, so in all American films they seem to have it at the end," he sighs. "I think this comes from the Gulf War. And, as I've mentioned before, since Ridley Scott made his flamethrowers, they all go with flamethrowers!"

Still, Giger praises Donaldson's direction and the film's "tempo," and although he is mostly pleased with the representation of his creature, he believes that Boss Film's computer-generated images of Sil rather let down Steve Johnson's fine puppet and model work. "Boss Films made the train very well, and also the underwater dream, but although the model was very good, they couldn't do the transparent Sil well because it's very complicated. Also," he adds, smiling, "they make everything move so quick you won't see the shit!"

For now, in addition to the recently revived *Dead Star* project – being hawked around this year's Cannes festival under the new title *Supernova* – and finishing off his book of *Species* designs and a separate volume, *Giger's Film Design,* Giger has another, even more expensive ghost train to finish off – the full size one he's building in his garden. I kid you not...

Yeuch! The tentacles, the slavering – unspecific – orifice, the nasty-thing-caught-in-a-glass-cage... It's all starting to look *very* familiar...

"I think Donaldson [the director] made it very good, until the last eight or ten minutes, then it isn't so good... Americans like fire, so in all American films they seem to have it at the end..."

HR Giger

Sil's claw-like hand echoes the look of the *Alien* monster perhaps a little *too* strongly.

Michael Madsen's stuck in the middle again, but this time *he* ain't the homicidal maniac...

innocent empath provides a neat counterpoint to Molina's world-weary cynic; Helgenberger's man-eating genetecist is as predatory in her own way as Sil; and the mutual dislike between Kingsley's and Madsen's characters makes for some good character interaction that lifts *Species* from your average straight-to-video shocker.

In a way, though, it was the central character of Sil who provided the greatest challenge to the film-makers, since she had to be both the beauty and the beast – capable of committing violent murders while still evoking sympathy, but all the time projecting the innocence of a child and the supercharged sexuality of a creature whose biological clock is – as Molina's character Arden observes – "in hyperdrive." After an extensive search, during which the film-makers auditioned a number of established actresses, Donaldson began to feel that Sil's innocence might best be portrayed by someone with little experience, and eventually settled on 19 year old Canadian model Natasha Henstridge, a total newcomer to acting. "I must be honest and say that everybody was nervous about going with someone so inexperienced," Donaldson says, "but the studio backed my decision, and Natasha turned out great. It was worth sticking our neck out for her."

Henstridge, who turned 20 during the production, says that, to a degree, she identified with Sil. "At the beginning, she is quite naïve," she laughs, "but she learns very quickly about the world and how to navigate through it. She changes so much during the film, realising her strengths and abilities as she goes. I had somewhat the same experience, but I had a lot more fun!"

WITH THE PRINCIPLE CAST AND CREW IN PLACE, THE FILM-MAKERS BEGAN the lengthy search for locations – which, in the script, called for a high-tech laboratory set in the middle of the desert, a downtown LA nightclub, a labyrinthine natural cavern filled with tar, a Victorian-era railway station, and a number of other outlandish and diverse settings. But it was the climactic confrontation between Sil and the surviving members of Fitch's team in the sewer complex and tar-filled caverns that caused the biggest headaches.

"The sewer was tricky to construct for several reasons," recalls delightfully-monikered production designer Muto. "We had to fill it

"With today's equipment and technology, we can do things we couldn't have dreamed of two years ago. It's been like building a new violin, and learning to play it."

Richard Edlund, visual effects supervisor

"nylon hose, industrial air ducting, plastic disks, ky jelly..."

...SO READ STEVE JOHNSON'S SHOPPING LIST. YOU SEE, ONCE THEY HAD THE DESIGNS, SPECIES' PRODUCERS HAD TO GET SOMEONE IN TO REALISE THEM. SO JOHNSON AND HIS COMPANY XFX HAD TO TAKE A TRIP TO THE LOCAL DIY STORE FOR ALL THE NECESSARY INGREDIENTS THAT WOULD MAKE THE SCARIEST MONSTER SINCE ALIEN. "I JUST HOPE PEOPLE REALISE THE CREATURE'S FUCKING TRANSLUCENT," HE TELLS **JOE NAZZARO**...

Imagine the problem: You've got the monster designs, and – as you'd expect from Swiss surrealist HR Giger – they're powerful and evocative. Now you need someone to actually *build* them and do them justice. That was just the situation Frank Mancuso Jr, producer of *Species*, found himself in. His solution? Steve Johnson and his effects shop, XFX. A veteran of such eclectic fare as *The Abyss*, *Highway to Hell*, *Freaked* and the recent TV adaptation of *The Stand*, Johnson found it his responsibility to realise the character of Sil in three dimensions, as well as create the various stages in her development, several human/alien transformations, and a few graphic gore effects for good measure.

Johnson's initial reluctance to take on this project – his company was stretched to breaking point already, working on half-a-dozen overlapping projects – was overcome by a call from the film's visual FX supervisor, Richard Edlund. "I know Richard very well, and he called me personally," he remembers, "and indicated that he wanted to do this as a partnership, and wouldn't be as interested if I wasn't involved."

Naturally enough, the biggest challenge for XFX was building the life-sized animatronic Sil puppet. What made the job doubly difficult was the fact that the creature had to be translucent, thus revealing the inner workings beneath the skin. As Johnson recalls, they had a big headstart, thanks to techniques developed on 1989's *The Abyss*. "We'd already done a tremendous amount of research and development there, and that really helped us. Not only did I have the knowledge, but my core crew of people from *The Abyss* already knew what existed, and what could be done.

"The difficult part with Sil was making sure she maintained a certain degree of translucency, but also having her able to move fluidly. We had to come up with materials that were fluid enough to not wrinkle, but still remain translucent enough to give us the look we wanted.

"At the last minute, I thought of using nylon hose, stretching and patterning it, and adding a few vac-u-form pieces to maintain muscle definition. For instance, from rib cage to pelvis, we glued nylon hose, painted it and held it in shape with a couple of clear vac-u-form pieces. After it was painted, we coated it with a layer of KY Jelly, which made it look really membranous and translucent."

And for the underlying layer, XFX simply went back to basics: "Most of that

Mmm, nice pot plant. *Species* uses all sorts of sfx, from CGI to full-size models.

This "Thing-in-a-tank" shot is reminiscent of *The Quatermass Experiment*; painful industrial accident kinda reminds us of *The Mangler*; mutation scene brings to mind a Biactol ad...

is what we call 'Giger-flex'; bits of tubing, and industrial air ducting, which he used to great advantage in *Alien* to create that bio-mechanical look. That stuff exists in all sizes, and it makes great organs and intestines. The sub structure that appears to be holding the shape of the skin is a series of discs, and had to be custom-made and retro-fitted after we created the outer skin. I had a team of model-makers creating it by hand."

The team constructed the actual Sil puppet in modular sections which could be taken apart, with several different sets of arms, legs, head and hair built for different purposes. "For example, there was the 'stunt' hair, which meant it was in its dormant position, folded back in a regal Egyptian head-dress. The second was the 'hero' hair, which had a double tentacle movement, so it was always moving, like a sea anemone. The third doesn't feature in the film; the one we called the 'peacock' hair: All the strands had the capability of unfolding and erecting themselves forward. It actually looked pretty startling."

Some of the other features unseen or barely glimpsed in the final cut include a double set of teeth, *à la Alien,* a four-way blink mechanism, and rolling bands of texture beneath the creature's cheeks. "My take is that Roger Donaldson is a very strong director," says Johnson, "and I believe he got the film he wanted to make. Had he wanted to show off these many details we offered him, he would have, but because he knew what he wanted and had a specific vision for the film, who am I to argue?

"Having said that, there is only one thing I am not happy about, and that's the fact that the creature's fucking translucent and we don't really get that. We took great pains and expended a tremendous amount of money making this thing see-through, and it really wasn't back-lit. I have no clue why that happened, because every time we had the puppet on set, I'd say, 'Roger, do you remember how in *Alien,* the dome was clear on the top of the alien's head and you could see into it?' He'd say no, and I'd say, 'Exactly. nobody knows that, but it was that way, and I would really hate for people to see this movie and not know that Sil was translucent.'

"I think, as it stands, it reads on a subliminal level, but you don't really see it properly. Had the puppet been more heavily back-lit, it would have been much more astounding."

"We took a really non-linear approach to a lot of the fx in the film, and didn't start by sculpting and moulding, or using the standard mechanisation techniques."

Steve Johnson, sfx supervisor

There're some truly gruesome make-up effects in *Species*, this icky spine thing giving the Chestburster a run for its money in nastiness.

With *Species* wrapped up, XFX has been working on a number of other projects, including *Lord of Illusions, The Stupids,* and a revival of *The Munsters.* However, Johnson feels that *Species* represents an important step forward for his company, and for the special effects industry in general. "What I'm most pleased with is we took a really non-linear approach to a lot of the fx in the film, and didn't start by sculpting and moulding, and using the standard mechanisation techniques."

"We created a whole sideways technology on how to build that stuff, and I'm very pleased with the result; it looks very organic. The chrysalis is alive, it doesn't look like a piece of rubber.

"We went for a less structured way of doing things, which leaves more room for happy mistakes, for natural asymmetry, and for things that look more alive, and I think in that we were very successful."

Sil (Natasha Henstridge) needs to mate. He thinks he's pulled. And he has. Poor bastard...

with water, deep enough to dive into in some places." Donaldson adds: "I wanted the sewer to feel like a labyrinth, where you don't know where you're going or what's around the next corner." In the end, although the subterranean sewer and tar pits were created on an enormous soundstage, they were so claustrophobic and convincing that none of the crew would walk in the water. "It's really creepy," grins Muto, "because it's all water, with little skylights filtering down."

Ironically, the climactic battle with Sil in the sewer proves to be one of the least effective sequences in the finished film, perhaps because it is the single scene in which Sil's ultimate alien form – with unmistakable, elongated echoes of Giger's xenomorph – is the most visible (some would say, risible). As is often the case with SF and horror, less is most definitely more, and in *Species*, Sil's minor transformations throughout the film are far subtler and more disturbing – if less fantastical – than her final translucent female form, based so faithfully on Giger's design that it seems to lack logic as Sil's ultimate manifestation. Giger fans (I count myself among them) may hang me for saying so, but, in a way, *Species* has enough going for it in terms of story, cast and tension not to need more than a glimpse of Giger's expert, but familiar, artwork – or to lean so heavily on its principle, obvious, influence.

It's a shame, but when director Donaldson says, "*Species* has all the elements of a great sci-fi thriller," it's painfully obvious how right he is – it has all the elements of a great sci-fi thriller called *Alien*.

IT SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE TO ANYONE WHO'S SEEN *SPECIES* TO discover that, within two weeks of the movie's US opening on 7 July, MGM were getting ready to announce a sequel. After all, *Species* couldn't have been left more blatantly open for a second instalment if it splashed up the words "TO BE CONTINUED..." in ten-metre high letters just before the end credits.

Sources close to the studio say that the sequel will be based on Dark Horse's comic book continuation of the first movie, written by *Species* screenwriter Dennis Feldman. "In it, Sil ultimately does mate with a human being," divulges Feldman, adding "with repercussions." Giger's certainly interested again – he's contributing covers to the comic, and has expressed interest in a second Sil story. Not that he's by any means certain they'll ask him back for the sequel. "They always do the sequels with other people," he sighs, *Aliens* and *Alien*³ clearly on his mind. "So I don't think they'd ask me."

Species will be released in the UK in late September, and will be reviewed in the next issue of SFX.

"I've always loved science fiction... I loved the first *Alien*!"

Roger Donaldson, director

evolution of the species

IT'S RARE – IF NOT UNHEARD OF – FOR A SCRIPT TO END UP ON SCREEN UNALTERED. **DAVE HUGHES** CHARTS THE MANY CHANGES IN SCREENWRITER DENNIS FELDMAN'S SPECIES, FROM THE FIRST DRAFT TO THE FINAL CUT...

For a first draft, Dennis Feldman's *Species* was a cracking read. Opening with the murder of an LA cab driver by a 12 year old girl, the story focuses on the attempt by a police detective and a molecular biologist to track down and destroy Sil, a deadly creature grown from a combination of human and alien DNA. Sil, who resembles an attractive human female, but whose extendable fingernails are a deadly weapon, is eventually tracked down to the biologist's home, where the cornered creature divides herself into a number of pieces in order to ensure the survival of her species.

Originally, *Species* was written to begin with Sil out in the real world (above); only later was the "caged little girl" sequence introduced (left).

Eight drafts later, Feldman's story still had the same gripping premise as that first draft, but several major changes had taken place. First, instead of having the audience's initial encounter with Sil take place as she commits cold-blooded murder, we see her as a frightened little girl being kept behind plexiglass in a high-tech laboratory. As a kindly-looking father figure watches over her, technicians prepare to fill the chamber she's in with cyanide in an attempt to destroy her. It is only later that we learn that this little girl has been grown using a combination of human and alien DNA, the latter received from outer space in a transmission repeated 27,000 times, and accompanied by a rather neat recipe for obtaining infinite energy from methane.

Our sympathies with Sil thus secured, it is only when she escapes and begins killing without remorse that our loyalties shift to the team tracking her down, now a five-strong ensemble led by Dr Xavier Fitch. In the final draft, Fitch's only desire is to see the result of his experiment dead, whereas in the earliest draft it was clear the scientist sought – more interestingly – to further the ends of his offspring by mating with her himself! For various reasons, several of the team members names changed along the way too: Dan Neeb became Dan Smithson, Bob Fitch became Xavier, and Preston "Press" Farley's surname changed at least twice, before the film-makers settled on Lennox.

But perhaps the most significant alterations between script and screen were made on Sil herself, who mutated from amoral predator to sympathetic, Frankensteinian monster. With HR Giger responsible for the alien's design, it's perhaps not surprising that her entire character changed as he worked out his concepts; that said, the artist had plenty of ideas that never made it to the screen. Perhaps the most intriguing of which was the "three-point change."

"When she would get angry," he explains, "first, she went dark red, then orange-red hot, then all of her clothes and her hair would burn up. After a certain time, she would go transparent and be black on the inside, like glass with carbon inside." Giger says that his intention was that the heat generated by this transformation would make her fire-proof – and thus impervious to Hollywood's traditional methods of destroying movie monsters. As those who've seen the film will know, at least he tried...

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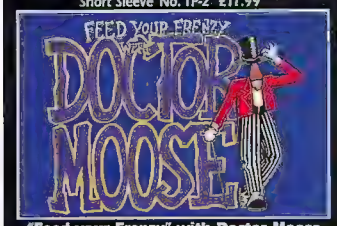

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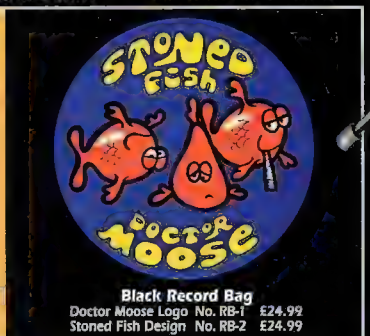

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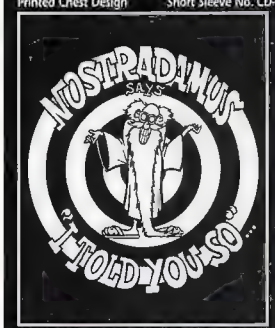

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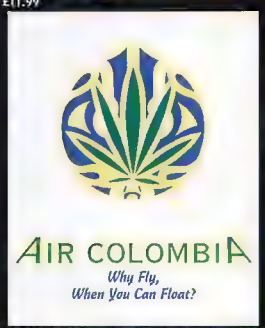

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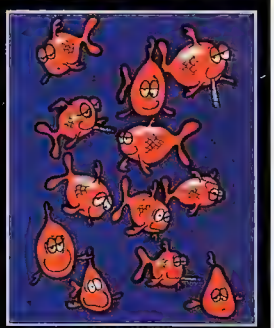

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"Most people reading a novel assume that it's truthfully reported... Or that no-one has tampered with the text... But to me these assumptions open possibilities for sneaky reversals."

Christopher Priest

ONE OF THE CLEVEREST AND MOST INVENTIVE OF BRITISH SF WRITERS, CHRISTOPHER PRIEST WRITES SPECTACULAR NOVELS WHICH ARE MUCH ADMIRED BY READERS BOTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE SF SCENE. NOW HE'S ABOUT TO HAVE HIS FIRST NOVEL FOR FIVE YEARS, THE PRESTIGE, PUBLISHED – AND IT LOOKS SET TO BE A TRIUMPH TOO. "HURRAH," WRITES AN OVERJOYED (AND PATIENT) **DAVID LANGFORD.**

Christopher Priest came to the forefront of British SF writing in the early '70s, first with *Fugue for a Darkening Island* (1972), his cleverly-structured tale of a Britain ripped apart by racial tension, and then with novels like *Inverted World*, *The Space Machine* and *A Dream of Wessex*. Besides winning (or being shortlisted for) all the usual international SF awards, he's a veteran of the first Best of Young British Novelists promotion, and his books carry enthusiastic plugs from such literary luminaries as the much admired John Fowles. He's not particularly prolific, however, so it's to general cheers and the popping of champagne corks that we welcome the first Priest novel in five years, *The Prestige*.

Chris is married to fellow-novelist Leigh Kennedy, has two children (twins, whose names can be found on the new book's dedication page), and lives in Hastings. It seemed logical, then, that Chris and I should chat on the seaside promenade under the blinding sunshine of a British heatwave. Is candyfloss bad for cassette recorders? Will the harsh cries of gulls drown out vital answers? Interviews are always fraught with unreliability...

Chris, you're regarded as a "literary" SF author, but our deputy editor is more fascinated by your brush with *Doctor Who*. What was the story?

"I'll take on more or less any writing job, provided it sounds interesting. *Doctor Who* was like that. The programme is a challenge to a writer: A tiny budget, a semi-fixed cast of characters, a fairly inflexible storyline – and millions of fans who'll beat the shit out of you if you overlook a crucial fact whispered by a minor character in a story first transmitted in 1968..."

But you still bravely did a script...

"I wrote two. The first was while Douglas Adams was script editor, before the *Hitchhiker* books. Douglas said they felt the show was drifting away from the SF heartland, and wanted 'real' SF writers involved. So he commissioned a four-parter called 'Sealed Orders.' I wrote this, and it was accepted but never produced. This was because of upheavals in the show while I was writing. Douglas Adams pissed off to become rich and famous, the producer also moved on, and by then the brief [the background story] had changed."

And script number two?

"The BBC commissioned a second story called 'The Enemy Within,' because of the first going wrong. Again it was written and paid for, but once more BBC upheavals wreaked havoc. They inflicted three different script editors on me, who all mucked around with the story and demanded different things – and the new producer turned out to be an appalling little [word obscured by microphone noise and triumphant seagull cries], more interested in being a media star than actually working with a lowly writer. It all led inevitably to a bust-up. I grabbed a parachute and took a header through the nearest emergency hatch."

Have you done any other TV/radio work?

"In theory, I'm writing a three-part SF/thriller original for BBC called *The Cull*, based on the Hungerford massacre. I actually passed through Hungerford that day, you know... Now the script is languishing somewhere in the Beeb, and the contract is about to lapse.

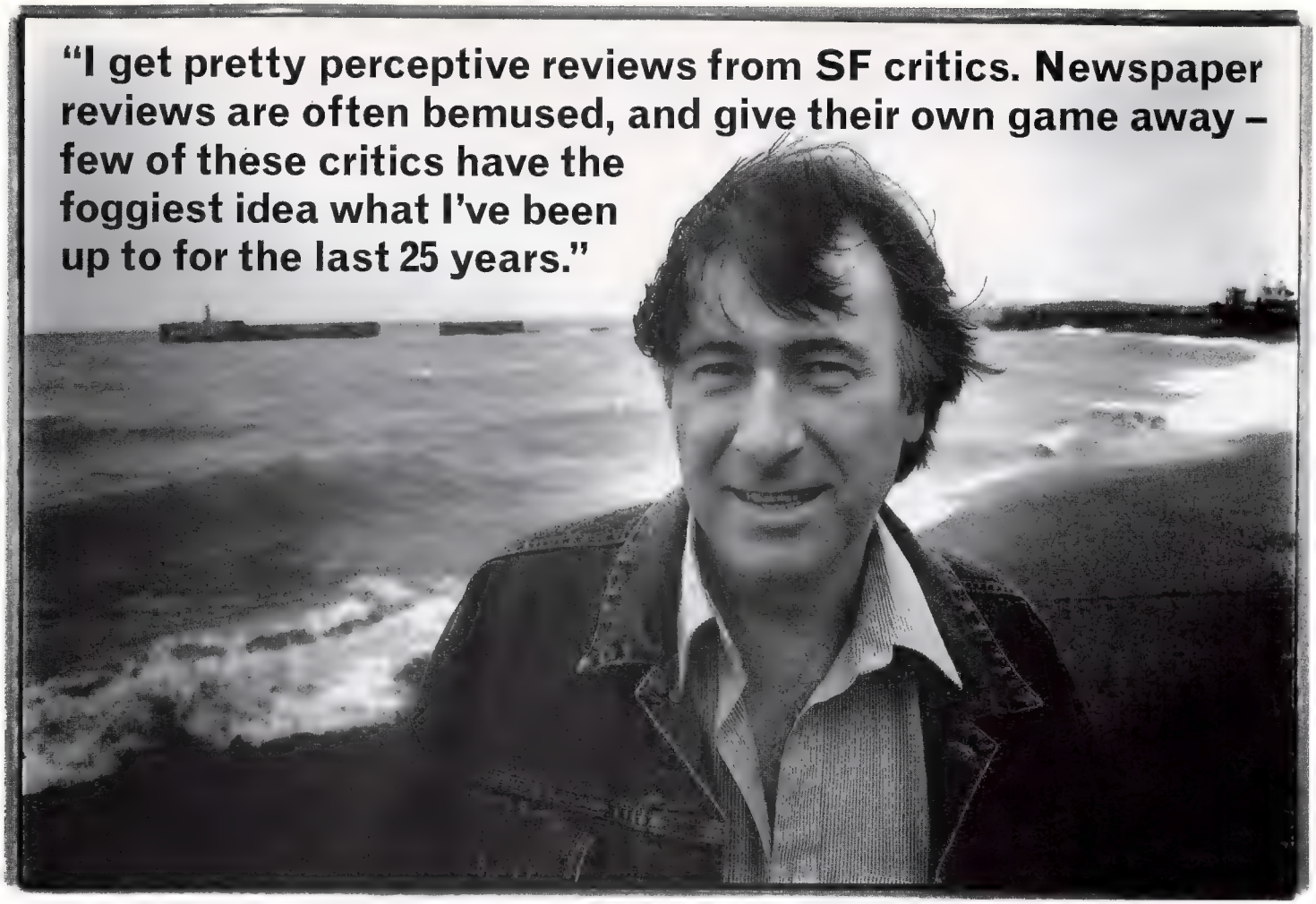
"Thames TV did one of my stories, 'The Watched,' as a 30-minute play. And in 1993, I dramatised *The Glamour* as a BBC Radio 4 play. Most of my later novels are under option for movies, of varying likelihood.

"People say my books are visual, but I think of them as novels, not first drafts for screenplays."

Often the elements of a book that translate well to film or TV aren't necessarily the most important ones you actually want to get across. From your own books, do you have favourite visual images? How would they translate?

"There's a scene in *The Glamour* where the two main characters are driving along, and one of them suddenly realises that a third person is sitting in the car, who must have been there unnoticed for several days. This is a fairly crucial scene in the novel, and it works 'visually,' but I can't imagine how anyone could film it. There's another scene in which a woman is raped by an invisible man, the point of which

Peter J. Stone


"I get pretty perceptive reviews from SF critics. Newspaper reviews are often bemused, and give their own game away – few of these critics have the foggiest idea what I've been up to for the last 25 years."

would presumably defy a camera. But film-making isn't my game, so maybe there's a way..."

I remember a surprise like that in *The Affirmation*...

"*The Affirmation* has several similar scenes. There's one with a particular room painted white, and another with a manuscript that the central character has written. Several people have found these scenes surprising, not to say shocking, because of the visual jolts. But they aren't the same kind of jolt you get from a horror movie, where something leaps out unexpectedly and scares the shit out of you. My shocks are based on a sudden devastating reversal of what the reader knows or believes.'"

Let's call it the "Priest effect." When did you first consciously do it?

"In *The Space Machine*. There's a character called Mr Wells. I'd planned him to be the real-life HG Wells. This never felt right, though: I suddenly realised that it made more sense to think of him as the unnamed first-person narrator of *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds* – a fictional character, but resembling the author. This placed the story in a more subtle light. It made it less 'reliable.' It was still a Wellsian scientific romance, but now in quotation marks; not just a pastiche, but a contemporary novel set in a metafictional past. This sounds as if I was tarting it up, but it opened up more possibilities for jokes, plot development and character insights, so it made the novel more enjoyable.

"After that, things were never quite the same. I can no longer take a plot seriously as bare plot. I'm always thinking: Where's the flaw in this, where does the idea leak? Unreliability soon starts creeping in, and I cheer up no end."

That subdued mischief in *The Space Machine* was something inattentive readers could overlook. Was it the unmistakable shocks in *The Affirmation* that make this your narrative breakthrough novel?

"Yes, the first really noticeable 'Priest effect' is there. That's a key novel of mine, if anyone wants to work out where I stand in relation to the rest of SF."

Although the SF audience is used to writers kicking holes in relativity or thermodynamics, don't you get protests when you play games with actual narrative?

"On the whole, no. SF readers seem sympathetic to the books, although they don't always like what I *say* I'm trying to do with them.

"I get pretty perceptive reviews from SF critics, while out in the wider world it's more patchy. Newspaper reviews are often bemused, and give their own game away – few of these critics have the foggiest idea what I've been up to for the last 25 years. The SF world is more actively tuned in to what writers like me are doing."

Going back further to *Inverted World*, what set you thinking about that weird, literally infinite world?

"That goes back a long way – to the middle '60s, I think. I was wondering about time travel in a topographical sense; a movement to and fro across a place that would put you forward and back in time."

Which appeared in your short story "Palely Loitering"?

"Yes. I find you can't stamp out an idea once it's taken hold. I remember not getting anywhere with it for ages, but that's where the city on rails eventually came from. The notion of the hyperbolic world goes back even further, to schooldays. Somewhere along the way I conflated them. I wrote the novel in 1973. I was young then: Everyone wore flares and had silly haircuts – that distant era when even Harlan Ellison's *Last Dangerous Visions* seemed credible."

Speaking of which, how come *The Book on the Edge of Forever* – your essay about this famous non-event – struck such a chord that it's been shortlisted for the non-fiction Hugo?

"There are two reasons, only one of which is to my credit. The

The SFX Interview

HEAD-TO-HEAD WITH THE STARS

CHRISTOPHER PRIEST ON CHRISTOPHER PRIEST

HE MIGHT HAVE SLOWED DOWN IN RECENT YEARS, BUT CHRIS PRIEST HAS WRITTEN MORE THAN HIS FAIR SHARE OF NOVELS – ALL INTERESTING, AND SOME BRILLIANT. BUT WHICH ONES DOES PRIEST HIMSELF RATE? HERE THEY ALL ARE, IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER, WITH COMMENTS BY THE MAN HIMSELF.

INDOCTRINAIRE (1970)

Slightly surreal tale about a chap held prisoner in future Brazil.

Priest: "It was a period. There are good bits, but unfortunately I can't remember what they are."

FUGUE FOR A DARKENING ISLAND (1972)

Disorientating cut-up-and-reshuffled narrative of nasty events in an England swamped by refugees from African nuclear war.

Priest: "My first book about someone who misremembers things. This has become a theme, based on one of my own failings. But one hostile review wiped out any cheerful thoughts I ever had about the book, and I haven't been able to look at it since."

INVERTED WORLD (1974)

This world really is inverted – a hyperboloid whose equator and poles taper literally to infinity. Mindboggling. Won the BSFA award, and was shortlisted for the Hugo.

Priest: "The best opening sentence I ever wrote, and in the middle of the book is the best SF scene I ever wrote. I dined out on these two bits for about ten years."

THE SPACE MACHINE (1976)

Cheery Wells pastiche which joins *The War of the Worlds* and *The Time Machine* into a single history, and helpfully fills in the gaps.

Priest: "Everything went smoothly until publication day, when *The Observer* memorably observed, '300 pages of homicidal tedium' – since when I have written in a state of politically correct humility."

A DREAM OF WESSEX (1977)

Futurological prediction by consensus hallucination that goes darkly wrong...

Priest: "A kind of valediction to trad SF, because it explicitly describes the process of futuristic imagining, then subverts the whole business. It has been described as the novel that predicted virtual reality."

AN INFINITE SUMMER (1979)

Atmospheric short stories, including BSFA award winner "Palely Loitering" and the Hugo-shortlisted "The Watched."

Priest: "A bit raw in places, a bit soppy in others, but with a particular mood throughout that I haven't caught since."

THE AFFIRMATION (1981)

Indescribable; essential Priest. The book seems to end in mid-sentence but can then be re-read, with new understanding, as its own sequel.

Priest: "A first deliberate effort to deal in a new way with stock SF ideas: Here, immortality. The whole novel subverts reader expectations – everything is unreliable. As a result, I think *The Affirmation* has the best overall plot I ever wrote, and also the best and most surprising plot revelation. On the other hand, it has rough edges."

THE GLAMOUR (1984)

Psychological invisibility as in GK Chesterton's story "The Invisible Man." People can pass unnoticed or be forgotten even while in plain sight... That's just the beginning.

Priest: "Again, nothing can be trusted. I still enjoy the plot, and the strength of the central metaphor (invisibility equals memory loss), but again feel uncomfortable with certain passages. *The Glamour* was once spoken of as a Hollywood 'vehicle' for Barbra Streisand and Christopher Walken, a fact which ten years later still has the power to make my goolies shrink in horror."

THE QUIET WOMAN (1990)

Deceptively understated tale whose backdrop is a withering extrapolation of Thatcherite Britain. A thoroughly privatised Military Intelligence, a news blackout about radiation-contaminated English counties...

Priest: "The BBC got hold of this, dramatised it, and then did nothing until the contract expired. I was dying to see how it would work out the story."

THE PRESTIGE (1995)

Two Victorian stage magicians are deadly rivals leading parallel lives. Each has his own unique version of a major magical illusion; each is baffled by the other's method. The two different secrets go beyond mere mirrors and trapdoors to be the central defining and distorting factor in their owners' lives.

Priest: "The newest, and therefore still a favourite. The usual Priest stuff about misremembering is in there, and subversion of the text, and a plot with many intricate developments. This, with *The Space Machine*, is the most widely researched of my books. I must now know more about magic than most people, but I still don't understand how tricks are done... even when I find out."

A PRIEST PRIMER

PERPLEXED ABOUT PRIEST? CROGGLED BY CHRIS? WHERE SHOULD YOU BEGIN? LET LANGFORD AND PRIEST POINT YOU IN ALL THE RIGHT DIRECTIONS...

Langford: "For lazy readers, the shorts in *An Infinite Summer*, whose 'Dream Archipelago' setting reappears in *The Affirmation*. Also, I'm mightily impressed by Priest's latest, *The Prestige*."

Priest: "If you want trad SF, then *Inverted World* must be the one, but it's no longer typical. *The Affirmation* is a good example of what I'm still trying to do now."

Internet Freebie: That Hugo-nominated Priest essay on Harlan Ellison's anthology is available free by e-mail. Just send an e-message to info-server@dcs.gla.ac.uk, containing these lines:
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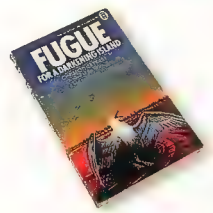
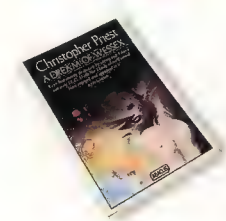




essay started as a conscious exercise in investigative journalism. You don't get much of that in the SF world, and the Ellison non-anthology was a God-given story waiting to be written. I think it came as sheer novelty to most people. All those lies and evasions, the promises and betrayals. The story has a horrid fascination.

"At first, I thought people would simply read the story, say tut-tut, and pass on. What I hadn't counted on was the army of Ellison camp-followers. These range from the worst sort of toady up to a kind of fannish armed militiaman, bent on crazed revenge against Ellison for some long-ago slight, real or imaginary. I got piles of mail from these types, respectively threatening me and urging me to put on camo gear and pack a machine pistol. At this point I realised the thing could run and run."

So long as people keep pushing...

"Latterly, it's been egged on by Ellison himself. It seems that every time interest dies down, Ellison pops up to threaten me with something, or to make up some bizarre new explanation of his inertia. In recent weeks, he's been comparing himself wonderfully with Michelangelo, doodling in the Sistine Chapel, while an angry Pope rages below. All this makes me think that in some odd way my essay gratifies his ego."

You've also released the essay on the Internet, which spreads it further. Have you used the Internet while researching other books?

"The Net is still too disorganised and unwieldy to be a really useful source of reference material, but the stuff is there if you know how to hunt around.

"For *The Prestige,* I downloaded several long texts about Nikola Tesla, but these were only useful in tiny bits. In the end, a visit to the science library at Imperial College gave me what I really needed to know about him, and in fact most of the 'hard' research for *The Prestige* was either practical (interviewing magicians and watching them perform) or from books."

But the Acknowledgements mention a certain Usenet newsgroup...

"Yes, I discovered alt.magic, where practising stage magicians meet to chat and swap ideas. Or that's what I thought before I quietly joined. As in a lot of literary research, serendipity is the real name of the game. I'd hoped to pick up a few conjuring tips, but the threads in alt.magic actually fell into two much more interesting subjects.

"One was an obsessive jealousy of David Copperfield – this is the magician famous for large-scale illusions (like making the Statue of Liberty vanish), but who is actually much better at smaller stuff, particularly when he works with kids. He's unquestionably brilliant at this, the best of the lot, and the others are all mad with curiosity about how he actually does his tricks. The other thread was obsessive secrecy about protecting their own magical techniques! I had already decided that jealousy and secrecy were to be the main themes, but that newsgroup gave me a real insight into the mentality of magicians. It's all in the novel now."

Many writers insist that serendipity works – the perfect idea, fact or mood pops up in real life just when you need it. Are you often lucky that way?

"Yes, but you have to create the circumstances in which the luck can strike! Once I'm in the thick of a novel I'm always amazed at how many ideas turn up out of the blue: Fragments of overheard chat, bits on TV, even some terrible holiday knick-knack which has been lying around your house unnoticed for years. All these can suddenly seem relevant to what you're working on. My novels have stuff like this growing all over them. The point is, though, the same ideas would instantly wither if the soil was barren."

In *The Prestige,* you yourself seem to play the part of stage-magician, offering teasing misdirection, devious truths and surprises from unexpected directions. People who like neat genre pigeonholes will be left uncertain for a long time, and then made uncertain again. Do you think that's a fair comment?

"All fiction misdirects the reader, or it can do. You hear thriller writers talking about it. What they mean is laying false clues, and all that. But when a magician uses 'misdirection,' he's up to something more subtle. A magician plays on the audience's assumptions so they misdirect themselves. The deck of cards still in its seal (so it must be brand new), the pitcher full of water (so it must be heavy to lift), the rope that has no knot (so it must be all in one piece)...

"That was the kind of thing I was trying to get at in *The Prestige,* but, as I say, it's not all that unusual in fiction. The narrative voice is comparable with a magician's act. Most people reading a novel told in the first person singular will reasonably assume that it's truthfully or reliably reported, or that only one person is writing it, or that no-one apart from the narrator has tampered with the text before it was printed, and so on, but to me these assumptions open possibilities for sneaky reversals. All in the cause of keeping people awake!"

Correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't there an unmistakable SF device lurking in *The Prestige,* with a nice Wellsian flavour? Not invisibility – but did I catch an allusion to *The Invisible Man?*

"Yes, but almost all SF devices refer back, ultimately, to HG Wells. Him being the main man, and all that. Actually, this particular referral was through another of my own books, *The Glamour.*"

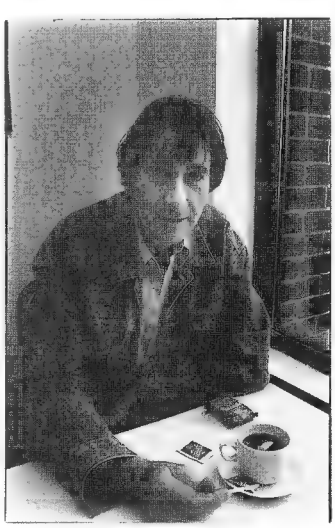
We all owe a lot to Wells... What are you planning next?

"I've started taking notes for a book called *The Gloss.* It's too early to say what it will be 'about,' but matters of identity and explanation come into it. I plan more than one book at a time, and have two others in reserve. One is called *The Allure* (identity and explanation don't feature, but offensive sex and gratuitous violence do). The other is untitled."

Er, quite. Time to finish now... We've been supposedly chatting on a sunny Hastings promenade, but after our discussion of narrative deceits I'll bet SFX readers are wondering if this interview is all it seems to be...

"POSTMASTER@cix.compulink.co.uk Your e-mail could not be delivered for the following reason: System downtime and seagull cries. Please resend your message."

Thank you, Chris Priest!

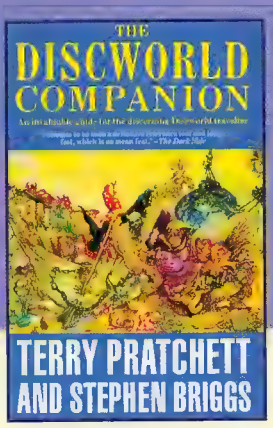


"Well, I'm currently writing a three-part SF/thriller original for the BBC called *The Cull,* based on the Hungerford massacre. I actually passed through Hungerford that day. Now the script is languishing at the Beeb, and the contract is about to lapse..."

Gollancz - A World of Imaginative Fiction

TERRY PRATCHETT AND STEPHEN BRIGGS

THE DISCWORLD COMPANION



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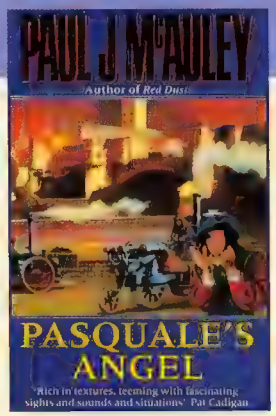
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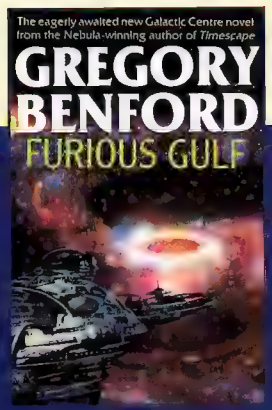
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FURIOUS GULF

MEET THESE THREE AUTHORS AT THE WORLD SF CONVENTION
Glasgow, 24-28 August

"I see Val Kilmer's wearing my Bruce Wayne glasses – but I didn't have the built-in nipples!"

It can't have been easy being Adam West. In 1965, less than ten years into a promising career as a small-screen actor and stage performer, he won the role of Batman in 20th Century Fox's camp and irreverent TV series, based on Bob Kane's all-time comic great. With its mix of pantomime performances, garish costumes and handy Bat-gadgets, it isn't too hard to see how the show quickly became a cultural phenomenon – the first series quickly spawning a feature film, then two further seasons. Adam West was suddenly as well known as the costumed crimefighter he portrayed. One day, for instance, 7,000 children visited Central Park just to meet their favourite comic hero – not Batman, of course, but the actor, Adam West.

But two years later, "Batmania" evaporated, the show was cancelled, and West found himself in the position every TV star dreads – being typecast. The next 20 years were a period of humiliating live appearances and debilitating roles in cheap movies or bad pilots, exacerbated by the seemingly mandatory alcohol and marital problems.

Camp as Christmas, but funny with it, Robin (Burt Ward) and Batman sported ludicrous clothes and spouted daft dialogue in the much loved TV series.

THEN CAME THE LATE '80S, ANNOUNCEMENT of Tim Burton's first *Batman*, and – for West – perhaps an opportunity to bring the TV Batman back. Adam West had admired Frank Miller's superlative *The Dark Knight Returns* – the story of a middle-aged Batman coming out of retirement to make sense of a Gotham City "plagued by worse than thieves and murderers" – and was ready for the resurgence of interest in the character that the book had provoked. So would the new film enable him to don cape and cowl once more?

The answer, sadly, was no. Contrary to popular opinion, West wasn't even offered the rumoured cameo role as Bruce Wayne's father. "Burt Ward and I weren't asked to return," he writes in his 1994 autobiography *Back to the Batcave,* "and, even more painfully, our

FOREVER BATMAN

AS BATMAN FOREVER WOWS AUDIENCES WORLDWIDE, THE 1966 BATMAN MOVIE – A SPIN OFF FROM THE LOVE-IT-OR-HATE-IT TV SHOW – HAS BEEN RE-RELEASED ON VIDEO. **DAVE HUGHES** TALKS TO ITS STAR...

contribution to the legend was ridiculed and denigrated... Although the series was aired and promoted and used in the marketing of the new films and in the merchandising."

Now, with the third and most successful of Warner Bros' *Batman* movies in an unprecedented number of theatres across the world, I asked West if he takes any pleasure from the fact that Warners has edged its new film closer to the colourful, camp capering of his version of the Caped Crusader...

"I haven't seen the new movie," he says. "I see Val Kilmer's wearing my Bruce Wayne glasses, but I didn't have the built-in nipples! However, I have heard that, although it's closer to our style, they didn't go far enough in that direction. Maybe with the next picture I could go in as Uncle Batman. We could have some rollicking, warm-spirited adventure that would bring fans of the two series together. I've done a lot of live appearances, nurturing that audience, and I know what they want."

Warners would be well advised not to scoff. Attendance figures for the three *Batman* movies may give the *Star Wars* trilogy a run for its money, but West's series plays to approximately *half a billion* people around the world every single day. And can Michael Keaton or Val Kilmer say with any conviction that, 30 years from now, they will be as recognisable as West is today?

"I doubt it very much," West says without malice. "That kind of lasting appeal doesn't depend on special effects and lots of money. It depends on charm, affability, personality. The people who grew up with our *Batman* loved it as kids for the adventure, the excitement, etc. But as you get older, you also see the jokes, which keeps it fresh."

YOU MAY SEE OTHER THINGS, TOO: WATCHING Fox's new print of the 1966 feature film again, my jaw dropped as I heard an exchange which

"It took me 20 years to break the typecasting," admits Adam West, probably the most famous Batman ever...

seemed – subtextually at least – to be a reference to the US's heavy-handed treatment of the Vietnamese at around the time the film was made. "What has yellow skin and rights?" asks The Riddler. "A ballpoint banana!" suggests Robin helpfully, to which Batman responds (with a knowing look), "Of course. What else could it possibly be?"

Lori Petty said recently that playing *Tank Girl* was a little like having Michael Jackson as your best friend – everyone wants to ask about them rather than you. Does West find the same thing about Batman?

"It took me 20 years to break the typecasting," admits West, "but even when it was at its worst I always loved the character."

Not that people always felt so warm about West's *Batman*. In fact, the earliest reaction to the show – that of the late 1965 test audience screening – was anything but positive. "They just didn't get it," West remembers. "They just didn't know what to make of what they were watching!"

Nevertheless, the actor held his faith that the public would respond favourably. "I was so busy doing the show I didn't have time to think about it," he remembers, "but when the crew began to fall down laughing after a couple of days, I knew we had something..."

West himself remembers falling about when he first read a scene in the pilot script, "Hey Diddle Riddle." "Batman had just entered a restaurant, in full costume, and was telling the *maître d'* he preferred to sit at the bar instead of a table since he didn't wish to 'attract any attention.' What was funny wasn't only the concept of this man in a flashy cowl and cape thinking he could be inconspicuous, but the scrupulously formal language that made you believe *he* really believed it."

Though he still works on occasion, West seems comfortable to have swapped the Hollywood rat race for his Idaho family ranch. He still commutes to LA, most recently to co-write and co-produce a comedy series in the style of *Red Dwarf*, and to talk with agents about next year's proposed celebrations to mark the 30th anniversary of the TV series.

IT'S TIME TO LEAVE, BUT BEFORE I GO ADAM West lets me in on a secret. "About 12 years ago, when I heard that (film producers) Guber and Peters were working on a new *Batman* movie, I submitted to Warners what I called 'A Scenario for Success.'" Now, he says, he keeps hearing that things from his "scenario" – his plotline, his choice of villains, etc. – have cropped up in the new movie.

"What do I do?" he asks. "Do I sue? If I did, I don't think I'd get anywhere. Besides, I'm a creative person. I want to keep working. I don't want to be a bitter, angry old man."

The digitally remastered version of the 1966 Batman *movie is now available from Fox Video at £10.99. Adam West's book,* Back to the Batcave, *is published by Titan Books (ISBN 1-85286-529-6) and costs £7.99.*

The first ever glimpse we got of Blake...

Hang on! Why's that ship flying backwards?

Nice logo, same about the grammar...

Law-abiding Blake is about to learn the truth.

Give us anger, give us pain, give us anything.

Eerie *Prisoner*-style flashback frenzy.

The Federation shows its true colours...

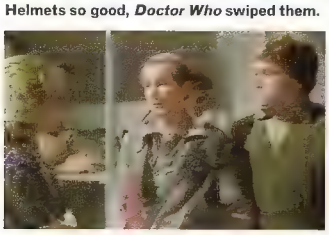
...and Blake shows us his fillings...

Helmets so good, *Doctor Who* swiped them.

The trial is a travesty... Blake's been set up.

Sfx in the first few episodes are impressive.

Jenna first appears on the prison ship...



...along with bumbling locksmith Villa.

The planets revolve far too quickly.

"Gan, are you dead yet? Thought not."

Avon prepares for years of cosmetics jokes.

The Liberator makes a dramatic entrance.

Yet another use for hoover attachments.

A truly original design for a flight deck.

"So do you reckon you can fly this thing?"

The decorator is sucked out into space...

Who put that dancefloor on the wall?

That's what we call wobbly special effects.

"Aaaaaaahhhh...haaaaaaaa...haaaaaaaa!!!"

He's had his Readybrek, but still looks peaky.

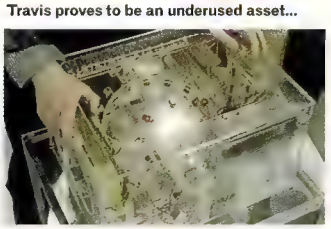
Group Four's top secret security device.

Travis proves to be an underused asset...

Cally always was prone to mental attacks.

A season later, and it's still happening...

Servalan... Did she influence Thatcher?



Orac, an amazing feat of engineering. Ahem.

"Here's one I made earlier out of a bog roll."

All screenshots © BBC Home Video

HOW GOOD (OR BAD) WAS BLAKE'S 7?

TERRY NATION'S BLAKE'S 7 (OR "BLAKES 7," AS THE LOGO HAD IT), BEGAN THE SAME NIGHT STAR WARS PREMIERED IN LONDON – 2 JANUARY 1978. A DARK, FAST-MOVING SPACE OPERA, IT COUPLED A SURFACE RESEMBLANCE TO STAR TREK WITH DOCTOR WHO PRODUCTION VALUES, AND WAS A HUGE HIT... JUDGE **DAVE GOLDER** PRESIDES OVER THE COUCH POTATO COURT AS IT PASSES THE FINAL VERDICT...

***Blake's 7* boasts some of the most fanatical fans of any SF TV show, and it's easy to see why. Set in the far future, when mankind has spread to the stars, but is largely ruled by a totalitarian government called The Federation, it told a very different tale to the optimistic *Star Trek* – the future is bleak, the population is kept passive by tranquillizing drugs, and the only hope of freedom lies with intergalactic Robin Hood Roj Blake, and his followers. There's arrogant Avon, yellow-bellied thief Villa, Little John-alike Gan, pretty Jenna, alien telepath Cally, and Zen – the supercomputer aboard the Liberator, an alien spaceship that the rebels find and use for their own ends.**

Not that it remained that way for long. Gan got killed fairly early on, then Cally, Blake and Jenna went missing. New rebels joined – conceited Tarrant, feisty Dayna, Barbie doll gunslinger Soolin, and portable supercomputer Orac. And if there weren't always seven outlaws, who's counting? Under Avon's leadership, the fight against the Federation went from bad to worse – the loss of the Liberator was a major blow – and then, of course, there was *that* ending...

Naturally, there was always one big problem with *Blake's 7* – it was trying for galaxy-spanning drama on a tiny BBC budget, with predictably wobbly results. The spaceships wobbled, the sets wobbled, the effects wobbled – the only thing that didn't was some decidedly wooden bit-part acting. Thus *Blake's 7* became as famous for being crap as it did for its ambitious storylines.

So now, almost 15 year since it went off the air, how does *Blake's 7* look? Is it the rough-edged classic the fans would have you believe, or the tacky hoot of popular memory? Only one way to find out... Our team for this evening – "SFX's 7," as we like to think of them – comprise Nick (who always comes on these evenings, and never brings his own drink), Lisa (who once made her own teleporter bracelet as seen on *Blue Peter)*, Dan ('70s disco and flares expert), Stuart (Scottish patriot with black, shiny fetish), Maff (Welsh, but no relation to Gareth Thomas), Jonathan (who has never phoned the BBC to complain) and me, Dave. Let the credits roll...

7.30pm "The Beginning"

Hang on. Bad start. The plan is to start with the first few episodes so we can see how Blake's crew come together. However, the tape provided proves to be the condensed and generally chopped about version the BBC released in the mid-'80s, which splices together "The Way Back," "Space Fall," "Cygnus Alpha" and "Time Squad" with all the skill of a blind, arthritic surgeon wearing boxing gloves. Ah well, it should save on the fast-forwarding. First up, the original credits.
Dan: (As a patently two-dimensional Liberator zooms up the screen) *"It's Captain Pugwash!"*

The story gets underway with Blake being led out of some future city by a couple of rebels who look about as rebellious as, oh, Robbie out of Take That.
Lisa: *"Look at those flares!"*
Dan: *"Oh dear. You can tell so easily when they move out of the studio, off video, and onto film."*
Maff: *"Why's the sound so crap?"*
Jonathan: *"The tracking's off. I think someone should check the tracking."*

In a secret hideaway that looks suspiciously like a BBC studio without any sets, Blake meets the rebel leader. But, horror, there's a traitor among the rebels, and the Federation boot boys wade in. Blake duly gets caught, tried and sentenced to live out his life on a prison planet.

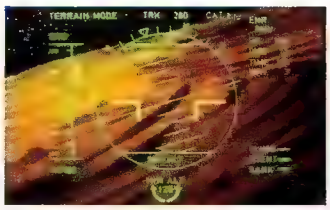
The trial is pretty impressive in a Terry-Nation-really-hasn't-been-watching-*The-Prisoner*-at-all-honest kind of way, but the real legend begins when Blake is sentenced to life on a prison planet. On the prison space bus that will take him there, our hero begins to meet other future members of his gang.
Nick: *"Hey, it's Jenna."*
Lisa: *"She looks a bit tarty."*
Dan: *"Avon hasn't discovered his leather-boy look at this point, I see."*
Nick: *"There's Gan. Not dead yet then."*
Dave: *"It's hard to tell."*

While everybody awaits a first glance of the Liberator, Terry Nation teases us with a handy, get-to-know-the-characters sub-plot, involving an attempted prison break, extras getting bath-foamed to death and lots of opportunities for the future Liberator crew to show their true colours.
Stuart: *"So, Avon's the computer genius, Villa's good with locks and is the token tool, Gan's the strong one and Blake is the natural leader... So what's Jenna then?"*
Maff: (As Jenna pretends to be submissive and alluring, then gets tough) *"Ah, so that's her talent – being a cliché."*
Dan: (As a suspiciously-bearded prison guard waves a gun at Blake) *"Go on, kill him now. That'll scupper the series."*
Dave: *"Not if seasons three and four are anything to go by..."*

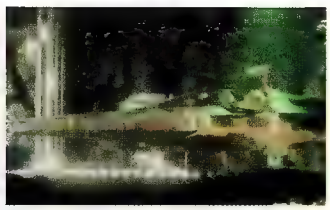
The escape attempt fails, but the real plot is soon underway as the prison ship comes across the Liberator floating, apparently abandoned, in space. It's an impressive sight,

Thunderbirds-style explosions ahoy.

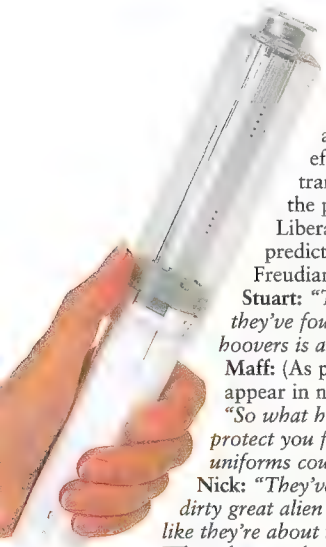
Pleasure or pain? The kinky factor is high.



"Massive chocolate meringue at six o'clock."



Season four boasts impressive model work...



basking in a special effects-induced halo – a lovely image which vanishes as rapidly as the effects budget. A transfer tube linking the prison ship to the Liberator appears to a predictable chorus of Freudian fnarring.

Stuart: *"The variety of uses they've found for bits of hoovers is amazing."*

Maff: (As prison ship guards appear in new "survival kits") *"So what horrors do they protect you from that the blue uniforms couldn't?"*

Nick: *"They've just discovered a dirty great alien ship, and it looks like they're about to redecorate it."*

When the guards sent to the Liberator mysteriously go a bit gaga, the fascist prison ship boss decides to send over "expendable prisoners" Blake, Jenna and Avon. Bad move. They're our heroes, you see, so when they get attacked by the same mental energy "thing" that melted the guards' brains, they easily resist it – instead of being sent mad by images of horrific events from their past, Blake fires a shot at nowhere in particular and everything's hunky dory.

The design of the Liberator itself still causes debate some 18 years on.

Dave: *"So, do you reckon it looks like it's flying backwards?"*

Maff: *"Why's there a communal coffee lounge on the flight deck?"*

Nick: *"I think it's impressive. But odd."*

Stuart: *"The seats are great, so long as everybody is five-foot eight tall and their heads rest on the cork bits."*

There's some concern about Villa and Gan, who are still on the prison ship *en route* to the prison planet. The Liberator therefore follows the ship to the prison planet, which looks suspiciously like the same world it passed earlier in the programme.

Stuart: *"It's spinning like a bastard – the days must be 32 seconds long."*

On board the Liberator, Blake, Jenna and Avon discover the computer Zen, a kind of beige, flashing disco dancefloor on the wall.

Dave: *"I always reckoned he was crew member number seven, until Orac appeared."*

Nick: *"But Gan died in season two, making Orac the seventh member."*

Stuart: *"Do you really think Terry Nation put that much thought into it?"*

Meanwhile, back on the prison planet, it becomes obvious that this abridged tape has lurched into a new episode – the background prisoners seem to be a completely new set of extras. They eventually run into some dodgy, hooded religious types, led by everybody's favourite mountain climber, Brian Blessed.

Up on the Liberator, Blake has discovered the teleporter room.

Nick: *"Those teleport bracelets – the only thing that* Blue Peter *ever made that looked better than the original."*

Stuart: *"They probably* were *the originals."*

Blake teleports down in wonderful wibbly vision, and Brain Blessed comes to the fore in his mad monk garb. It all proves too much to take, and the jury decides it's time to move on – despite protest from purists that we really should stay to watch Cally come on the scene.

9.30pm "Seek, Locate, Destroy"

Picture the scene – a gasworks near Slough... Er, I mean a top security Federation power plant. (Well, it looks like gasworks, despite the large signs in groovy '70s lettering telling us otherwise...)

Maff: (On seeing the guard robot) *"What the bleedin' hell is that? Dusty Bin?"*

Nick: *"And why didn't they just teleport down*

"On the prison planet, Blake's crew eventually run into the ultimate horror: Brian Blessed."

inside the security fence, anyway, and save themselves a lot of trouble?"

Blake and the crew infiltrate security and blow up the base, then make their escape in a suspiciously two-dimensional-looking Liberator, chased by Federation ships.

Nick: *"Classic* Blake's 7 *wobbly effect!"*

Dave: *"Those weren't wobbly effects. Those were evasive manoeuvres!"*

Stuart: (As the shot cuts to a spinning spacestation) *"It's a KP Outer Spacer!"*

Not quite. This is Servalan's abode. The coldly glamourous chief Federation baddie is obviously miffed at Blake and co.

Stuart: *"She's Maggie Thatcher, isn't she? The calm, stern voice, the gentle nodding..."*

Nick: *"...the fascist tendencies."*

Main villain number two is also introduced at this point – Travis.

Nick: *"Is that a cowpat on his face?"*

Stuart: *"Surely plastic surgery is good enough in the future to repair what amounts to a mud coloured birth mark?"*

Jonathan: *"The tracking's still not right."*

Dave: *"Let's fast forward to season two."*

9.45pm "Countdown"

An impressive special effects-laden riot kicks off this season two episode.

Dave: *"Gan may be dead by this point..."*

Maff: *"If he's in it, we'll know."*

Stuart: *"Not necessarily, if his acting so far is anything to go by."*

Stuart: *"Avon's in his proper black Avon gear at last."*

Jonathan: (Pressing buttons) *"This tape refuses to track properly as well. How does BBC video manage it?"*

The Magnificent Seven arrive on the scene and teleport down into the riots. Well, some of them do.

Lisa: *"I see the two women get left behind..."*

Stuart: *"The trouble with having two token female characters is that one of them has to develop a character sooner or later, otherwise they'll both reach critical mass and something messy will happen."*

Dave: *"Like one of them gets bored and leaves. My money's on Jenna."*

As the pizza ordering gets underway (unlike the plot) nobody's paying much attention to what's going on, although there's some mention of a doomsday weapon and Avon meets a nemesis from his past...

Stuart: *"Del Grant? What is this,* EastEnders? *He probably sold Avon a dodgy motor once."*

Nick: *"Nah, Avon shagged his sister."*

Stuart: *"It* is EastEnders."

Jonathan: *"Maybe if we just switched the sound to mono..."*

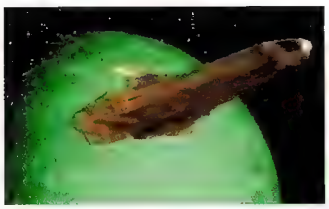
Through the garlic bread, anchovies, pineapple and lager consumption, "Countdown" looks pretty accomplished really, despite some dodgy use of stock footage and Villa being more of a tool than usual. But despite the fact that it goes the full distance without the aid of a fast-forward button, it's all still unmemorable stuff.

10.20pm "Auron's Children"

And so to season three, and a much better episode. Blake and Jenna have vanished after the war at the end of season two, to be replaced by Tarrant (Blake substitute) and Dayna (female and black – right on).

Nick: *"Hey, new credits. They're better. Still an unfeasibly large number of stars, though."*

The plot this time moves to Cally's home planet. Apart from being telepathic, her race


...but the Scorpio's design is a bit dull.

The subservient Slave replaces Zen. Boo!

The Scorpio's more functional flight deck.

"Have *you* betrayed us, Blake?" Sob. Sob.

are also expert at cloning, which enables Jan Chapel to play two parts – Cally and her "brood mate." The problem is her people appear to be dying from some hideous disease, which produces the kind of complexion that wouldn't look out of place in a David Cronenberg movie.
The entire Couch Potato team: *"Urgh."*

Then it's back to the Liberator, which seems to have found an area of space vacated by all the stars that wanted to appear in the title sequence. (Suddenly, the front door bell goes. A figure in leather, with chunky kneepads and a motor cycle helmet appears at the door. Cue the inevitable "Arrgh, it's the Federation" jokes. In fact, it's just late arrival jury member Trenton, along with equally leather-clad biker chick Clur.)

Meanwhile, back on the screen, Servalan's whinging on about getting clones of herself done on Cally's home planet.
Stuart: *"Like, she's going to have trouble reproducing, I'm sure."*
Clur: *"Surely, if you're a mad bastard it's not a good idea to have another 20 of you wandering around?"*

Orac – the computer that looked like it was made out of an old fish tank (and was) – makes a significant appearance.
Stuart: *"I never could take seriously a computer which'd be buggered if you lost the remote control down the back of the sofa."*
Maff: *"He sounds like he's voiced by the bloke who did* The Moomins."

Despite this and some blobby make-up, "Auron's Children" boasts a nervy hostage crisis, a great performance from Jacqueline Pearce as Servalan, a fine plot and some brilliant moments for the regulars, and thus also escapes fast-forwarding.

11.10pm "Blake"

The last ever episode. Cally has vanished in favour of Soolin (Glynis *Dempsey and Makepeace* Barber), the Liberator has been replaced by the Millennium Falcon-influenced Scorpio, Zen has been downgraded to the irritating Slave, and there's yet another new opening sequence, this one starring a ZX Spectrum generated HUD display emblazoned across a large chocolate meringue. The episode begins with the Seven fleeing their hide-out, fearing that its location has been discovered by the Federation.
Maff: *"Those effects are pure* Thunderbirds!"
Trenton: *"Yeah, but* Thunderbirds *set up a kind of alternative reality where you could get away with that kind of thing."*
Dave: *"That said, this looks pretty good for* Blake's 7. *The Scorpio is boring though."*
Clur: *"It looks like a wedge of old Edam."*

Sadly, as the action moves to specially-shot-for-that-episode space footage there's a marked deterioration in the quality of the special effects.
Dave: *"Oh God, it's back to the wobbliness in a big way. The effects in the first season were better than this. It looks so, well, lazy."*
Nick: *"The inside of the Scorpio's dull. The control room looks like it's only got two walls. All round, it's not a patch on the Liberator."*
Maff: *"It's supposed to look 'functional' and 'gritty' in a post-*Alien *kind of way, I suppose. But with silver-painted dodgem cars used for consoles, I'm not so sure..."*

Avon, it appears, has tracked down Blake, who's now working as a bounty hunter on a planet that sounds like a prize cheese. That's where the Scorpio is heading. We lucky viewers, however, get the chance to meet Blake much sooner – he is indeed on Gorgonzola Optima, sporting a well-hard scar and doing something even more surprising.
Stuart: *"He's acting! So now we know what he's been up to while he's been away."*

At last we find out the truth. Blake is indeed a bounty hunter – but that may be just a front... Is he working for the Federation, has he got an agenda of his own, or is he just another pawn in the Federation's game,

"Hang on, those weren't wobbly effects, they were evasive manoeuvres!"
Dave

drugged up to the eyeballs on yet another mind-subduing narcotic? It's hard to tell...

When the Scorpio reached Edam Maximus, it's attacked by Federation ships. All the crew teleport down to the planet, except Tarrant, who crashes the Scorpio in a scene bizarrely reminiscent of the Enterprise crashlanding in *Star Trek: Generations*. It's an emotional moment, especially when the set starts to break up, and the consoles really *do* start moving around like dodgem cars...
Clur: (As Tarrant falls down a hole in the Scorpio's deck) *"What's he fallen into?"*
Nick: *"A plot hole."*

Tarrant, however, survives. Blake pulls him from the wreckage and then flies him in an aircar back to the rebel hideout – the rest of the Seven (except Slave, who is obviously well and truly off-line now) follow in another aircar. However, even now no-one is sure if Blake is setting them up or not.

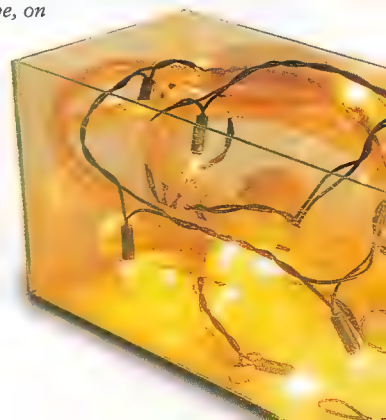
And then it happens. The final scene. Avon and Blake come face to face. Tarrant cries out that Blake has betrayed them. Avon looks constipated. Blake looks, well, like Blake with a scar on his face. A gun goes off.
Stuart: *"Real blood. That's a bit gory for pre-watershed 1981, surely?"*
Dave: *"The rumour is that Gareth Thomas would only play the part again if it was made clear he was killed. Which meant blood."*
Nick: (As the Federation arrive and start blasting away at the rest of the Seven) *"The others aren't bleeding though."*

No, but they have all definitely been shot. Only Avon and about 15 Federation guards are still on their feet.
Dave: *"Interestingly, you don't ever see Avon actually get killed. The picture fades and you just hear gun fire."*
Trenton: *"But he was surrounded. That was your classic Custer's Last Stand."*
Nick: *"Isn't the first shot you hear after it goes black from Avon's gun? There's some theory that he shoots Orac to stop the Federation getting the computer..."*

Indeed there is. And there are others too, like the one where Avon takes out all the guards (unlikely), one where it's Avon who was working for the Federation all along, and one that "they were only stunned."
Maff: "The last shot you hear sounds like a Federation gun as well."

And the debate rages on... Time, then, for an assessment.
Dave: *"That was a pretty good ending for a series. Unexpectedly downbeat."*
Maff: *"Despite the dodgy effects, it had a good atmosphere too."*
Dan: *"In fact, all in all,* Blake's 7 *wasn't half as bad as I remembered it."*
Dave: *"Yeah, but remember – we didn't watch the episode where the main villain is a bloke with his head stuck through a piece of card with a shrivelled body stapled to it. Or the* Island of Doctor Moreau *one, with all these blokes who look like they've been crossed with Highland cows. Or..."*
Clur: *"Okay, You've made your point, Dave."*

The entire first two seasons of Blake's 7 *are being released by BBC Video this month at £7.99 per tape, on 13 tapes, with two episodes per tape. The second set of 13 tapes (seasons three and four) will be released in October.*



The Liberator

FOR ALL THE STICK BLAKE'S 7 EFFECTS HAVE TAKEN OVER THE YEARS, FEW WOULD DENY THAT THE LIBERATOR WAS ONE OF THE MOST ORIGINAL AND DISTINCTIVE SPACESHIP DESIGNS OF THE '70S...

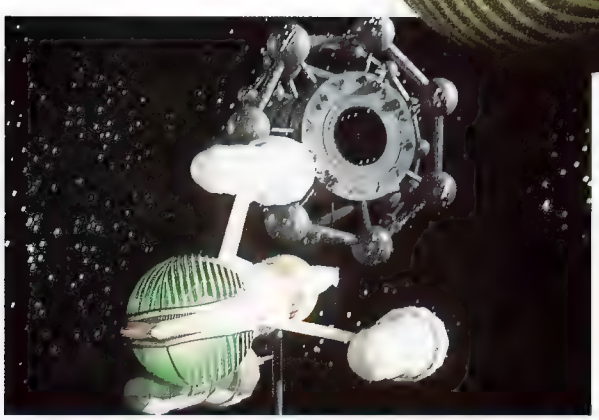
The Liberator is a vast alien spaceship – original name: unknown – discovered floating abandoned in space by the prison ship London in "Space Fall," the second episode in the first season of *Blake's 7*. When some sort of psychic defence mechanism drives investigating prison guards loopy, a bunch of expendable prisoners are sent in to investigate and, well, the rest is history...

The problem with the Liberator is its very alien-ness. Very little was ever established about it in the show, save that it was vast, fast, and heavily armed. Mat Irvine, one of the visual effects designers on the first two seasons, remembers it well...

STARDRIVE

THE BIG GREEN BALL AT THE BACK OF THE SHIP (ORIGINALLY THOUGHT BY MANY WHO FIRST SAW IT TO BE THE COCKPIT) IS, IN FACT, A SPACE/TIME DISTORT FIELD GENERATOR. IN OTHER WORDS, THE ENGINE.

MAT IRVINE: "IN ROGER MURRAY-LEACH'S ORIGINAL DESIGN, THIS WAS TO HAVE BEEN AN OBLATE SPHEROID, A SQUASHED SPHERE, BUT WE THOUGHT: NO-ONE'LL BE ABLE TO TELL. LET'S MAKE IT A SPHERE. THE BIG PROBLEM WAS THAT IT WAS MADE OF PERSPEX, AND LIT FROM INSIDE WITH A PHOTO FLOOD. IF YOU LEFT IT ON FOR ANY LENGTH OF TIME, IT USED TO MELT! AND, YES, WHEN WE FIRST SAW THE DRAWING, EVERYONE SAID: OKAY, WHICH WAY DOES IT FLY?"

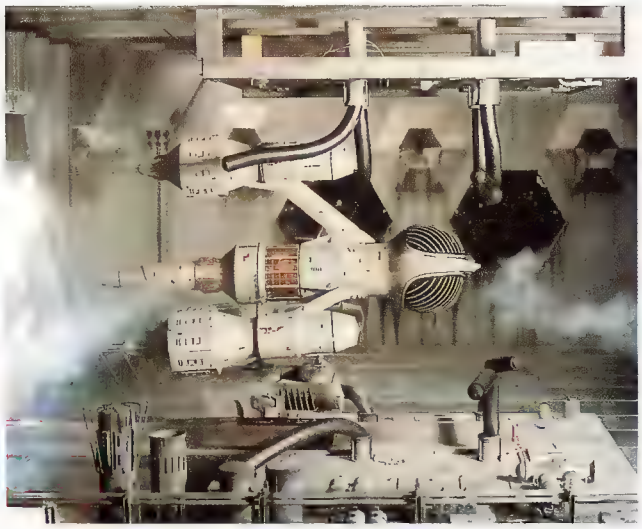


Here's the Liberator in action, approaching Spaceworld. When designer Mat Irvine was asked to create "chaser ships" for the season two finale, he used the famous ship as a source of inspiration. "They were built by the same race that built the Liberator," he explains, "so I designed them as 'fighter' versions of the Liberator 'bomber'."

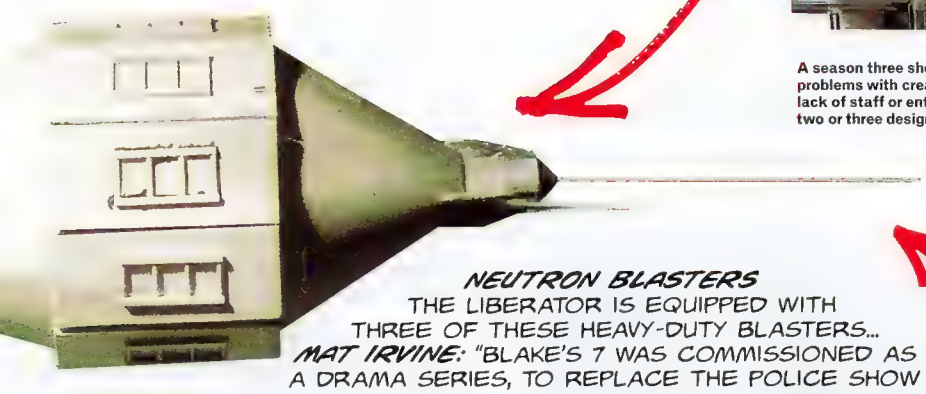
POWER BANKS

THERE ARE SEVEN OF THESE: TWO IN EACH OF THE LIBERATOR'S THREE EXTERIOR PODS, AND ONE IN THE MAIN BODY. THEY CAN POWER THE SHIP FOR 130 HOURS AT MAXIMUM SAFE CRUISING SPEED, AND TAKE 12 HOURS EACH TO RECHARGE.

MAT IRVINE: "THE LIBERATOR MODEL WAS A REAL PIG TO FLY; IT WAS MOSTLY MADE OUT OF FIBRE-GLASS, BUT THERE WAS A LOT OF BRASS IN THERE TOO, WHICH IS REALLY HEAVY. THE THREE-FOOT MODEL WEIGHED FAR TOO MUCH TO HANG ON WIRES, OR EVEN PUT ON A POLE. WE HAD TO SIT IT ON A TROLLEY AND WHEEL IT AROUND. WE COULD HARDLY GET IT THROUGH THE WORKSHOP DOOR! MARTIN BOWER LATER BUILT A HALF-SIZE MODEL, WHICH WAS MUCH MORE PRACTICAL. THERE WERE ONLY FIVE LIBERATORS BUILT IN ALL, AND TWO OF THOSE WERE VAC-FORMS WHICH WE BLEW UP IN THE BATTLE AT THE END OF SEASON TWO."



A season three shot of the Liberator trapped inside a giant spacestation. As ever, the problems with creating effects scenes for *Blake's 7* were all down to lack of money, not lack of staff or enthusiasm. "We had enough effort," remembers Mat Irvine, "usually two or three designers, plus six assistants. But we *never* had enough money."



NEUTRON BLASTERS

THE LIBERATOR IS EQUIPPED WITH THREE OF THESE HEAVY-DUTY BLASTERS...

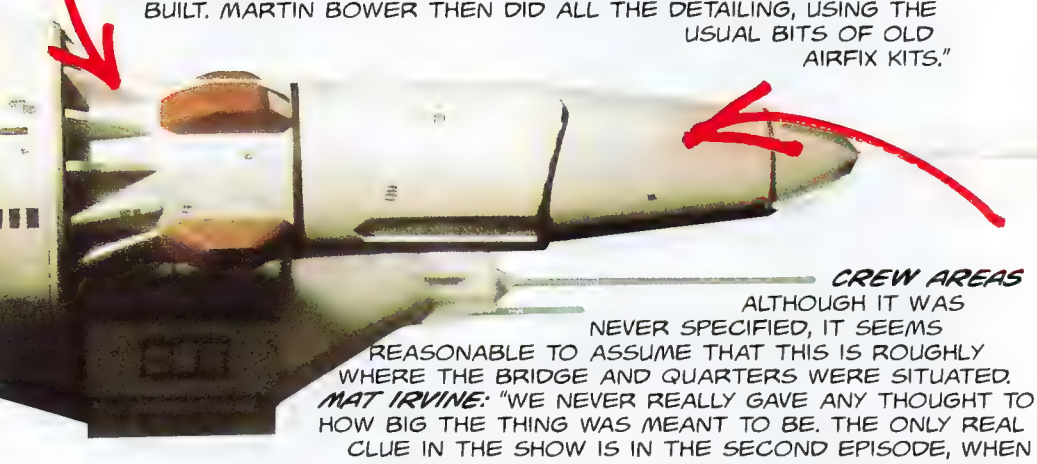
MAT IRVINE: "BLAKE'S 7 WAS COMMISSIONED AS A DRAMA SERIES, TO REPLACE THE POLICE SHOW SOFTLY, SOFTLY. UNFORTUNATELY, THAT HAD MAYBE ONE EFFECT PER SEASON, SO THEIR EFFECTS BUDGET WAS £50 PER EPISODE. WHEN WE STARTED, WE WERE GIVEN THE SAME BUDGET!"

The Liberator in orbit around the Federation's central control complex, Star One. The various background planets for the series were painted by top space artist David A Hardy. As Mat Irvine remembers: "There was no motion control in those days, so everything was done as front projection. We used to work on film for those bits – you still can't get the right look on video."

RAM SCOOP INTAKES

ONE CENTRAL AND THREE EXTERIOR FIELD GENERATORS SURROUND THESE INTAKES, WHICH SCOOP UP "INTERSTELLAR MATTER" FOR FUEL.

MAT IRVINE: "IAN SCOONES WAS GIVEN THE TASK OF GETTING IT BUILT. MARTIN BOWER THEN DID ALL THE DETAILING, USING THE USUAL BITS OF OLD AIRFIX KITS."



CREW AREAS

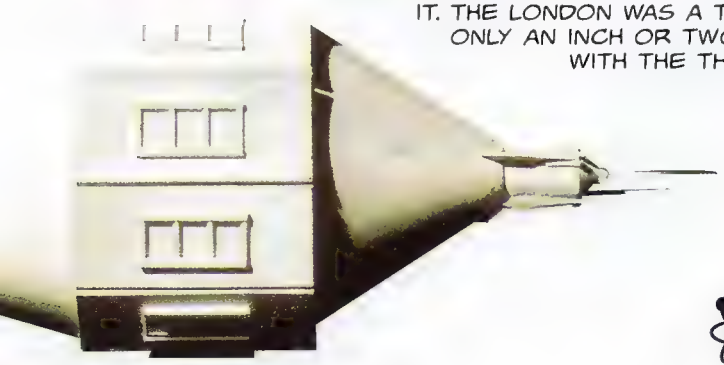
ALTHOUGH IT WAS NEVER SPECIFIED, IT SEEMS REASONABLE TO ASSUME THAT THIS IS ROUGHLY WHERE THE BRIDGE AND QUARTERS WERE SITUATED.

MAT IRVINE: "WE NEVER REALLY GAVE ANY THOUGHT TO HOW BIG THE THING WAS MEANT TO BE. THE ONLY REAL CLUE IN THE SHOW IS IN THE SECOND EPISODE, WHEN YOU SEE THE PRISON SHUTTLE LONDON ALONGSIDE IT. THE LONDON WAS A TINY THING IN THAT SHOT, ONLY AN INCH OR TWO LONG WHEN DOCKED WITH THE THREE-FOOT MODEL OF THE LIBERATOR..."

MAIN PROBE

CONVENIENTLY NEGATING THE NEED FOR ANY COMPLICATED WINDOWS OR DISHES, THE LIBERATOR CAME EQUIPPED WITH WHAT'S SCIENTIFICALLY TERMED "A BIG POINTY THING" AT THE FRONT...

MAT IRVINE: "ALL THE PROBES WERE MADE OF METAL, AND WERE, UNSURPRISINGLY, QUITE DANGEROUS. PLENTY OF PEOPLE WERE STABBED BY THE BLOODY THINGS WHEN THEY BACKED INTO THE MODEL BY ACCIDENT!"



GRIMM FUTURE

ONE OF THE MOST STUNNING, STYLISH SCIENCE FICTION FILMS OF THE LAST FEW YEARS IS THE CITY OF LOST CHILDREN, DIRECTED BY DELICATESSEN AUTEURS JEAN-PIERRE JEUNET AND MARC CARO AS A SORT OF FRENCH ANSWER TO TERRY GILLIAM'S BRAZIL. **NIGEL FLOYD** – WHO'S BEEN EAGERLY AWAITING THIS, ONLY THEIR SECOND FEATURE, SINCE HE FIRST SAW DELICATESSEN IN '91 – LIKES WHAT HE SEES...

With their extraordinary debut film, *Delicatessen*, French film-makers Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro instantly established themselves as a wildly imaginative directing duo. Blending cartoon humour, fairy tale grimness and crazy, stylised sets into a riotous retro-future vision, they served up an appetising tale of cannibalism and vegetarian vigilantes. In creating their long-awaited second feature, *The City of Lost Children*, they've drawn upon the same visual influences – Grimm's fairy tales, the surreal sado-slapstick of Tex Avery's cartoons, '20s American cartoonist Rube Goldberg's oddball contraptions, Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*, and, crucially, the foggy atmospherics of Marcel Carné's "poetic realist" movies of the late '30s, namely *Quai des Brûmes* and *Hôtel du Nord*.

Yet, like its predecessor, *The City of Lost Children* fuses these disparate elements into a cinematic world that is completely unlike anything you've seen before. "What we really want to do is create an entire universe," explains Marc Caro, "together with the places, the atmosphere and the characters who inhabit that universe. The first impressions that we got of these fantastic worlds were through Jules Verne, but since we are creating a universe, we take *bric-à-brac* from anywhere and do whatever we like with it. It's ideal for us, because it encapsulates everything that we find beautiful." Jean-Pierre Jeunet immediately chimes in: "Exactly! We want to catapult the audience into a world that they don't know, but which has its own rules, its own logic."

In appearance, the two film-makers are like chalk and cheese: Jeunet is neatly coiffed and stylishly dressed, Caro shaven-headed and clad from head to foot in black. Having known each other for nearly 20 years, however, the two are a seamless double-act. They characterise their relationship as "not so much schizophrenic as stereophonic." Not even the presence of a translator can prevent their infectious enthusiasm from spilling out into our Savoy hotel room. When scripting, designing or filming, they operate a similar division of labour, with Caro controlling the design and overall "look" of the production, while Jeunet handles the actual hands-on direction.

"We want to catapult the audience into a world they don't know, but which has its own logic."

Jean-Pierre Jeunet, director

ON A MIST-SHROUDED OIL RIG PLATFORM, crazed inventor Krank (Daniel Emilfork) lives with his dwarf mother Miss Bismuth, a brain in a fish tank called Irvin, and six identical, cloned court jesters (all played by Dominique Pinon, the hero of *Delicatessen*). The decrepit Krank is growing old prematurely because he cannot dream, so in order to arrest this ageing process, he despatches his Cyclops henchmen to the local port, where they kidnap children, whose night-time reveries he then steals with the aid of his "dream machine." Ex-whale harpooner turned circus strongman One (Ron Perlman) first gets wind of this when his friend Miette (Judith Vittet) is snatched by the mad scientist's goons. Determined to wrest her from Krank's clutches, One enlists the help of opium-addicted flea-trainer Marcello (Jean-Claude Dreyfuss) and a gang of feral street children, inhabitants of the orphanage run by a pair of Siamese twins.

When I first interviewed Jeunet and Caro – at the time of *Delicatessen's* British release – they mentioned, in passing, a quote from Canadian astrophysicist and philosopher Hubert Brill, in which he said that, "The whole idea of art is to recreate a children's playground." This seems peculiarly appropriate, so I bring it up in relation to *The City of Lost Children*.

"Yes," enthuses Jeunet. "The cinema is like a Meccano set, with everything that goes to make up a movie – costumes, editing, music, surroundings, ambience – so that's where that playfulness comes in." Backing his partner up, Caro mentions a few more of their influences – Orson Welles, the Coen Brothers, Lars von Trier – before adding, "Something we have in common with all of them is this idea of playing with the camera, treating it like a toy..."

ONE OF THE MAJOR STRENGTHS OF *THE CITY of Lost Children* is its ability to recapture a

Deranged scientist Krank's dream-sucking device looks a little like the Riddler's, but its effects are rather *less* pleasant...

One's *petit frère*, Denrée, seems unaffected by Krank's device.

Miette's gang of lovable little rogues, and (below) one of the Borg-like Cyclops sent out by Krank.

"The first impressions we got of these fantastic worlds were through Jules Verne, but since we are creating a universe, we take *bric-à-brac* from anywhere and do whatever we like with it..."

Marc Caro, director

sense of child-like wonder, yet simultaneously maintain the darker, more disturbing tone of an adult fairy tale. Even so, despite being chosen as the opening film for this year's Cannes Film Festival, the film received only a lukewarm reception in France. A disappointed Jeunet attributes this to critics' and audiences' inability to suspend their disbelief and enter into the film's fairy tale world. "We've found that the best audience for the film is children aged between 10 and 15. 12 year old kids came out and went crazy, whereas adults had much more difficulty letting themselves go."

Caro clearly wants to emphasise this point, relating *The City of Lost Children* to other fairy-tale movies: "Films like *Pinocchio* and *Tom Thumb* were not all sunshine and beans either. In fact, they were bleak and cruel, and even some of the most traditional Walt Disney cartoons have some cruelty in them. In France, there were children who really annoyed their parents saying, 'I wanna go see this movie with the nasty Father Christmases.' And the parents would be saying, 'I don't know about these Father Christmases, it sounds too scary.' But the kids had heard about them at school, so they wanted to go and they'd bug their parents like mad until they took them."

Is it Donovan's brain? Is it the brain of Morbius? Is it Orac? No, it's just Krank's decidedly "odd" disembodied uncle.

It would be crueller still to deprive you of the impact of the first of the Santa scenes, so suffice it to say that in a later scene, the demented Krank dresses up as Father Christmas and, leering into the faces of a group of nursery-age children, tries out some would-be cutesy talk on them. The effect, not surprisingly, is not quite what he had in mind: The distressed children burst into floods of tears. Some parents objected to these scenes, but Caro assures me that none of the kids was prodded or frightened in any way. In fact, as dictated by the supervising child welfare officers, the kids weren't even in the same space as the nasty Père Noël – their seeming proximity was achieved through the use of computerised special effects.

"For the children, it was a peculiar exercise, because we filmed them with four cameras as soon as they got up from their naps; but you can't make children cry." Caro then makes a whirring noise, and circles his finger to indicate the hours ticking by while they waited for the sprogs to turn on the waterworks. Then Jeunet takes up the story, and lets something slip: "Actually, there's one shot where Krank is really close to a kid, and the kid is really crying, because he was genuinely scared. That was the day the children's welfare people visited the set, but we just waited until they had left..." My faith in the cruelty of humanity is restored...

Although working on a modest budget, Jeunet and Caro worked closely with their sfx collaborators, the Duboi and Buf Compagne companies, to pull off some remarkable visual *coups*. In an incredible sequence that is reminiscent of those scenes in *Delicatessen* where Aurore Ligator makes repeated attempts at suicide using wacky Heath Robinson contraptions, a single tear shed by heroine Miette is followed by the camera on its labyrinthine journey. Equally impressive are the digital matte paintings for Krank's model oil-rig, and the seamless cloning effects used in the scenes where Dominique Pinon is seen multiplied by six. These sequences posed particular problems, as Caro is keen to explain.

"In the scenes where Dominique Pinon had to act with the five clones of himself, we used complicated, computerised 'motion control' techniques," he explains. "But the real difficulty was for Dominique, who was acting opposite five versions of himself. Not just in one scene either, but in six versions of the same scene – everything had to be repeated over and over.

"So it was difficult not only technically, but also dramatically. We had to synchronise every movement and line of dialogue. Of course, we had the Duboi special effects guys on set all the time, and we had a video monitor on with which we followed the scene. But it's like creating five or six layers of film, so if something goes wrong you have to start over right from the beginning."

The 3D work by Buf Compagne presented different challenges, which required ten months of intensive work by 15 artists and software engineers, plus 750 days' worth of computer calculations. All this for five minutes of film. As well as creating Miette's tear, the team was also responsible for the hopping movements of Marcello's fleas, which introduce hallucination-inducing fluid into their victim's bloodstream when they bite. At the mention of this, Jeunet suddenly perks up.

"First of all, you had the backdrop of the docks or the interior of a room, then you had Marcello's finger. And if there were camera movements they had to be piloted by computer. Then the modelled flea was animated to jump up or scuttle about. Finally, a computer program analysed the grain of the film and reapplied it to the synthesised image, so it could be integrated. That way you gain depth of perspective, so the first leg can be in focus while the second leg is slightly out of focus." Caro adds with a smile: "The technique is the same as the one used in *Jurassic Park*, but we are poor film-makers, so we had to do much smaller creatures – not dinosaurs but fleas!"

Leaving aside for a moment the specifics of their current project, we talk more generally about how Jeunet and Caro come up with their imaginative ideas. "Usually," explains Caro, "what comes first are the characters, the images, and the atmosphere that we want to create. Then out of those visual ideas, the themes will develop. Then from here you find that there is a thread that will lead you into the story."

The key to the consistency of the worlds Jeunet and Caro create is their total control over every level of the film's production. This method of working, which served them so well on *Delicatessen*, was born out of their earlier work on model-based animated shorts. They first made their name with a short called *Le Bunker de la derniére Rafale*, which played in Paris for six years as a support to David Lynch's *Eraserhead*. They compare their background to that of Terry Gilliam, the ex-Python turned visionary film-maker whose work they admire and often refer to. When I asked them about when *Delicatessen* was set, they replied, "1930" – a sly reference to Gilliam's working title for *Brazil*, "1984."

"When you make that kind of animated film, you have to do everything yourself, get involved in every level," Jeunet explains. "And it comes out afterwards, when you start making features. Terry Gilliam has said the same thing. We can't exercise that much control anymore, but the first short film that we did together *(Le Bunker)* we made like an animated film, only with real people instead of models."

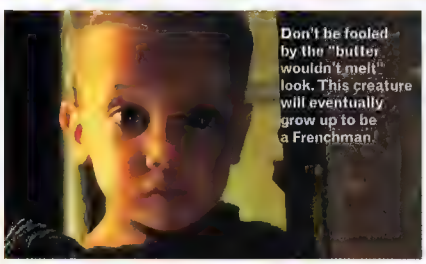
When we first spoke – at the interview about *Delicatessen* – Jeunet and Caro had just been offered money to develop a Hollywood re-make, plus the chance to sell the re-make rights to their second feature, which hadn't been written at the time. Sadly, nothing came of it, and after spending two years making *The City of Lost Children*, they have no wish to rush back into another major project.

However, the day after we spoke, Jeunet returned to Paris to shoot a TV commercial for Barclays Bank, which he described as "very comic-strippy," and which we should see next year. A bank advert in the style of *Delicatessen?* A mouth-watering prospect indeed.

The City of the Lost Children *is released nationwide on 1 September, and is reviewed on page 72.* Delicatessen *is being released on video by Electric Pictures Video on 28 August.*

"I was speaking with Linda Hamilton last week. She says you're an absolute beast." A voluptuous floozie approaches the hero of the piece, One (Ron Perlman).

One of Krank's six cloned court jesters (all brilliantly played by the versatile Dominique Pinon).

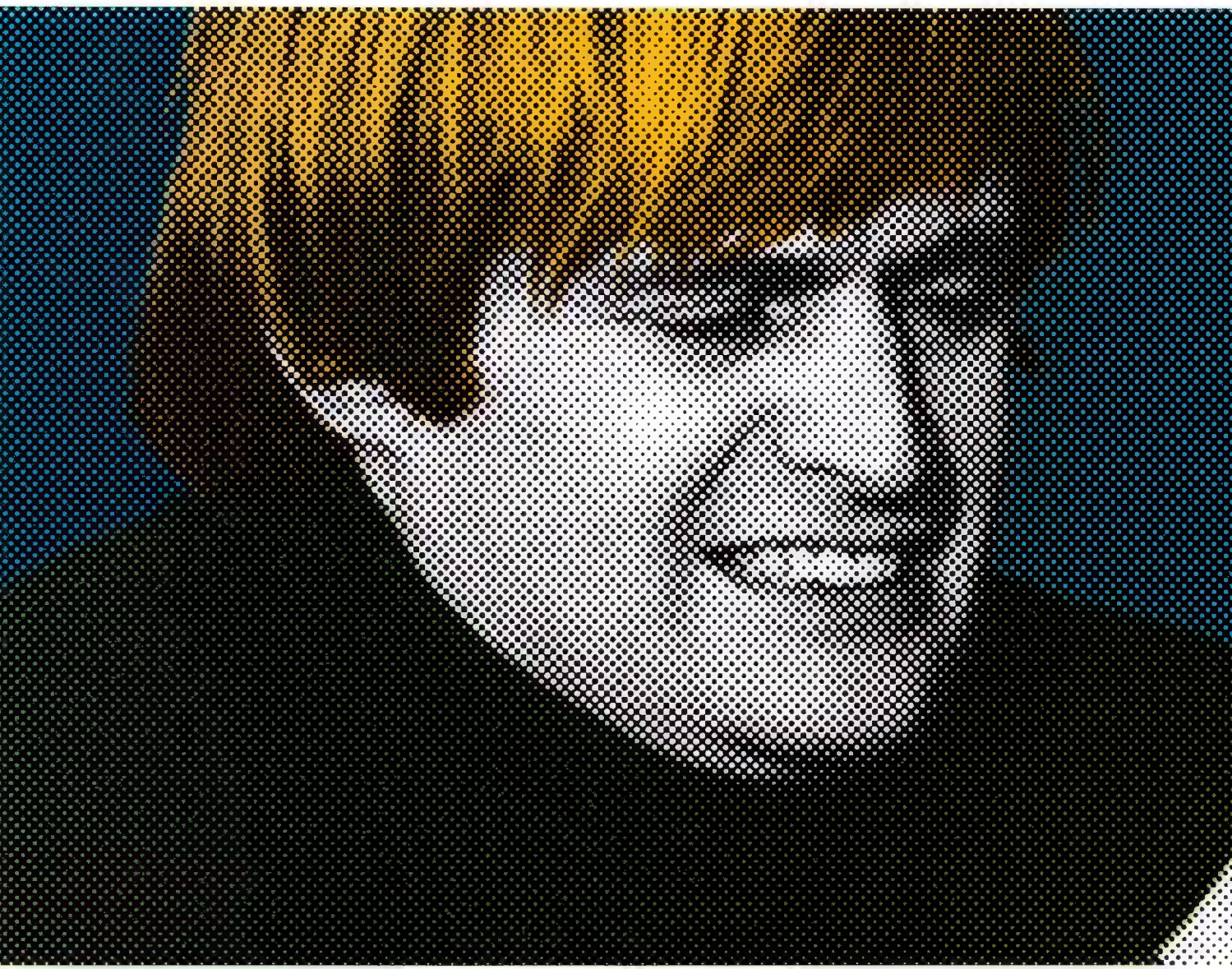


Don't be fooled by the "butter wouldn't melt" look. This creature will eventually grow up to be a Frenchman.

Dominique Pinon as four of the six clones, celebrates his (their?) birthday.

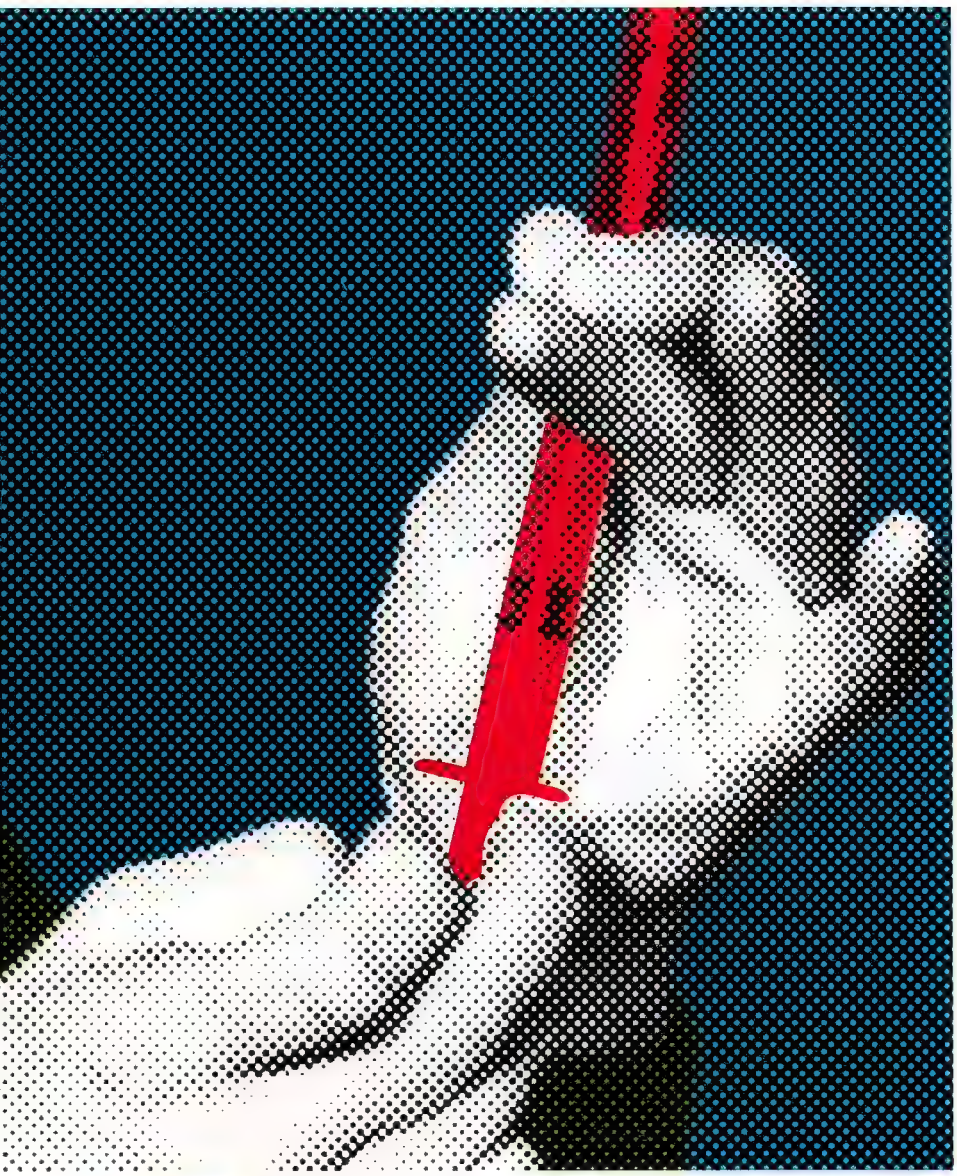
"What comes first are the characters, the images, and the atmosphere... Then out of those visual ideas, the themes will develop. Then, from those themes, you find there is a thread that will lead you into the story."

Marc Caro, director



THE INVISIBLE MAN

To most genre fans, David McCallum is best known as secret agent Illya Kuryakin from The Man From UNCLE. Others think of him with Joanna Lumley as elemental time detective Steel in ATV's bizarre Sapphire and Steel. **Jon Abbott,** however, remembers quite a different role, and one that – despite flopping badly in the US – was quite a success over here...



There have been a number of *Invisible Man* TV shows over the years, two of them British – a late '50s version (which had precious little to do with HG Wells' original novel, and has recently been shown on ITV and Bravo), and a stylish 1984 six-parter, which adapted the 1897 novel quite faithfully. Neither, however, bear more than a passing resemblance to the forgotten version that came in-between – an action-adventure which, despite the presence of Brit star McCallum, was pure Hollywood through and through.

Like the first TV version of the story, the McCallum show featured a sympathetic Invisible Man, who used his strange abilities for good – and was a far cry from Wells' bitter, destructive character. As with *The Six Million Dollar Man* before it, the pilot was surprisingly dark in tone, the regular series that followed lightening things up considerably. It began with Doctor Daniel Westin (McCallum) accidentally rendering himself invisible in a lab accident, while working for the sinister KLAE corporation. Later, when he discovers KLAE wants to use his discovery for militaristic purposes, Westin destroys his equipment and the key to the process. Until he can return himself to normality, he decides to use his extraordinary powers for secret government missions he deems worthwhile, often aided by his wife, and all the time appearing in public under a lifelike rubber mask and gloves...

Melinda Fee – a favourite of the editor at the time, by all accounts – co-starred with McCallum. Where is she now?

INVISIBLE MEN: A screen history

Invisible men were nothing new on film or TV when Dr Westin had his unfortunate accident. Back in 1933, for instance, horror veteran Claude Rains had portrayed the lead character in James Whale's *The Invisible Man. The Invisible Man Returns* followed in 1940, this time starring Vincent Price as the luckless scientist. It was the espionage thriller *Invisible Agent,* however, which pitted Jon Hall against the Axis forces in 1941, that most closely mirrors the format of the McCallum TV show. There was also an *Invisible Woman* in 1941, and an *Invisible Boy* in 1957, while everyone from Disney to Charles Band has had a go at exploiting the concept since.

Invisible monsters abound in TV episodes *(Lost In Space, The X-Files* etc.) and films (memorably *Forbidden Planet* and *Predator)* too, while the more obvious human delights of invisibility have been explored in various lame teen comedies *(Zapped* and *The Invisible Maniac* spring to mind). More restrained mischief-making is to be found in TV's *Topper, Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased),* and *Quantum Leap,* or cinema's *Abbott and Costello Meet the Invisible Man, Ghost,* and *Memoirs of an Invisible Man,* among others.

"Regular" TV heroes who've enjoyed brief spells of invisibility include the original *Star Trek's* William Shatner and three *Next Generation* crew members, *Time Tunnel's* James Darren, and – bizarrely! – *Magnum's* Tom Selleck.

Where are they now?

For all the diversity of his roles on TV and – occasionally – the cinema, David McCallum always seems to be playing David McCallum, and *The Invisible Man* was no exception. He's a likeable guy, all the same, and makes for a charismatic hero. There's no trouble finding him today, either – he's escaped the obvious typecasting as Illya Kuryakin of *The Man From UNCLE* by making many other TV and film appearances. In Britain, he's starred in shows like the serials *Kidnapped* and *Colditz* (recently reshown on UK Gold), as well as the oddball '80s Joanna Lumley co-starrer *Sapphire and Steel,* now reshowing on Bravo. More recently, he's been seen in Britain in the series *Trainer,* and in the US guested on

Fact File

Regular cast
Dr Daniel Westin: **David McCallum**
Dr Kate Westin: **Melinda Fee**
Walter Carlson: **Craig Stevens**

Developed for television by **Steven Bochco, Harve Bennett**
Executive Producer: **Harve Bennett**
Producer: **Leslie Stevens**
Music: **Hal Mooney**

Total number of episodes: **12 and a pilot**
First US airdate: **8 September 1975**
First UK airdate: **26 September 1975**
Last original episode aired: **19 January 1976**
UK broadcast history: **BBC 1, Sky, BBC 2**
Some TV precedents: ***Topper, The Invisible Man*** (1958, UK), ***The Fugitive, The Immortal, Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)***
Some TV descendants: ***The Gemini Man, The Invisible Woman*** (1983 TV movie), ***Quantum Leap, The Flash***

Guest stars of interest: Peter Donat *(Time Trax)*, Nancy Kovack, Roger C. Carmel *(Star Trek's* Harry Mudd), Ross Martin, Michael Pataki *(Spider-Man)*.

In case you were wondering, here's how those *Invisible Man* effects were done. David McCallum (or someone) wears a blue mask and gloves, and is filmed against a screen (top), then the background's projected in (below), and he disappears. Magic!

Babylon 5 and co-starred in the cancelled *VR5*, soon to be shown on British TV.

Craig Stevens – blandly amiable and pally as the new "viewer-friendly" Walter Carlson (as with *The Six Million Dollar Man*, the mean and self-interested boss from the pilot was given a genial facelift for the series) – was at the end of his career in '75. Back in 1964, however, he was charming the ladies as "Mr Broadway." Earlier still, in the '50s, he was a frequent guest player in various drama series, and enjoyed fame as TV cop hero Peter Gunn. When *The Invisible Man* ceased production, however, he secured a role in the popular mini-series *Rich Man, Poor Man*, and appeared in some episodes of *Dallas* in 1981.

Of Melinda Fee, however – so perky as McCallum's wife Kate – there has been no sign. Perhaps she became invisible herself?

So was it any good?

Although *The Gemini Man*, which revamped *The Invisible Man* concept the following season, was a blander show, at least it avoided the biggest problem McCallum had by having the hero simply flip a switch to become invisible. The trouble with *The Invisible Man* was that, while it was inventive (and "realistic" after a fashion), the weekly rubber mask rigmarole took a lot of effort to film, and remained highly unconvincing. The blue-screen work, although vastly superior to British efforts at the time, always looked painfully fake. And that wasn't the only criticism... The face mask McCallum waved about when changing back and forth was clearly not capable of representing McCallum's features well enough to fool anybody, and no-one to date has made an "invisible man" show where the objects being mysteriously moved around don't bob up and down as if being carried by a *Thunderbirds* puppet. It was also odd, as many viewers commented on at the time, to think that Westin was performing all his missions in his birthday suit!

A bigger problem was voiced by McCallum himself – he hated the lighter scripts that followed writer Steven Bochco's pilot (Bochco was later to create the highly successful *Hill Street Blues, LA Law* and *NYPD Blue*), saying that he'd "signed on to do *The Fugitive*, and ended up doing *Topper*."

Do you remember who replaced David McCallum as the lead character in the follow-up to *The Invisible Man, The Invisible Man Becomes The Gemini Man*?
Answer at the bottom of the page

And light the scripts most definitely were – the first episode had McCallum and wife (Melinda Fee), doing a cheating-the-cheaters scam that was already old when *Mission: Impossible* did it. Another one went for the fake spiritualist/haunted house cliché, while similarly predictable (if slightly superior) was "Sight Unseen," in which Westin rescues a blind girl from gangsters (think about it!).

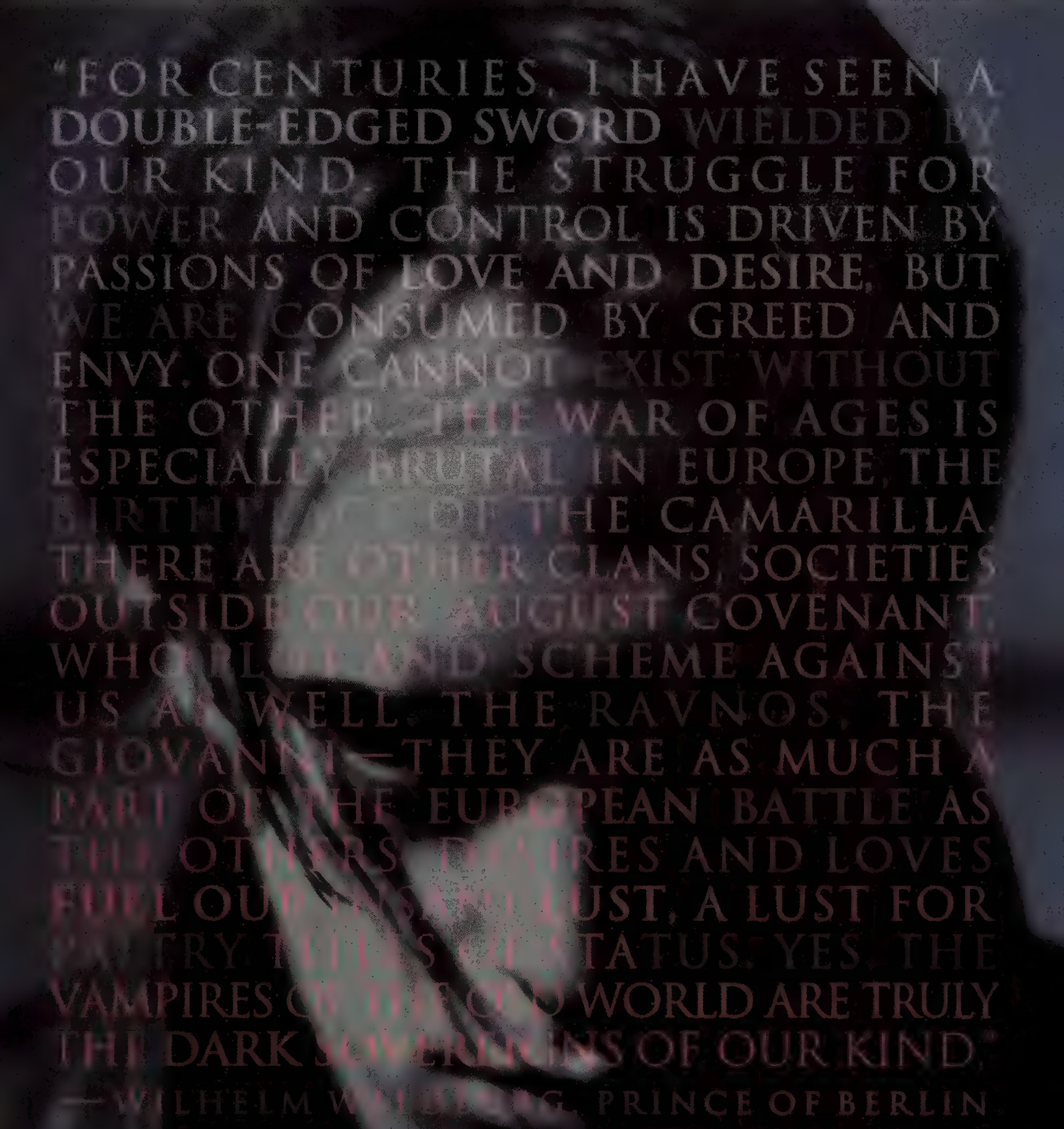
There were better episodes, however. "Go Directly to Jail" was another Bochco script, and had one of his typically clever ironies behind the premise, while "Attempt to Save Face" was a clever idea inside a stupid plot. Of them all, though, perhaps the best was "Power Play," which had an escapee from an insane asylum discover Westin's secret within the KLAE laboratories. This episode tied in with the earlier "The Klae Dynasty," another of the better episodes, in which Westin played an invisible bodyguard...

Answer: Ben Murphy. This show is more generally known as *The Gemini Man*.

A few things you probably didn't know about...

The Invisible Man

- *The Invisible Man* producer Harve Bennett also produced *The Six Million Dollar Man*, and went on to produce the original *Star Trek* movies.
- A young Melinda Fee can be seen in the "Space Circus" episode of *Lost in Space*.
- In the pilot, Craig Stevens' role of Walter Carlson was played much meaner by actor Jackie Cooper, a former child performer who was later to become the *Superman* movies' Perry White.
- Before starring in *The Man From UNCLE* with Robert Vaughn (and *Topper's* Leo G Carroll!), David McCallum starred in two legendary episodes of the original '60s *The Outer Limits* series – "The Sixth Finger" and "The Form of Things Unknown." Interestingly enough, *The Outer Limits* creator Leslie Stevens was the producer of *The Invisible Man*. The story editor was Seeleg Lester, who was also involved in the anthology classic.


"FOR CENTURIES, I HAVE SEEN A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD WIELDED BY OUR KIND. THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER AND CONTROL IS DRIVEN BY PASSIONS OF LOVE AND DESIRE, BUT WE ARE CONSUMED BY GREED AND ENVY. ONE CANNOT EXIST WITHOUT THE OTHER. THE WAR OF AGES IS ESPECIALLY BRUTAL IN EUROPE, THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE CAMARILLA. THERE ARE OTHER CLANS, SOCIETIES OUTSIDE OUR AUGUST COVENANT, WHO PLOT AND SCHEME AGAINST US AS WELL. THE RAVNOS, THE GIOVANNI—THEY ARE AS MUCH A PART OF THE EUROPEAN BATTLE AS THE OTHERS. DESIRES AND LOVES FUEL OUR PASSION. LUST, A LUST FOR POWER, THIS IS OUR STATUS. YES, THE VAMPIRES OF THE OLD WORLD ARE TRULY THE DARK SOVEREIGNS OF OUR KIND."
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Welcome to the SFX reviews section – your guide to this month's releases, from films to videos, comics to TV shows. If it's new, you'll find it rated here...

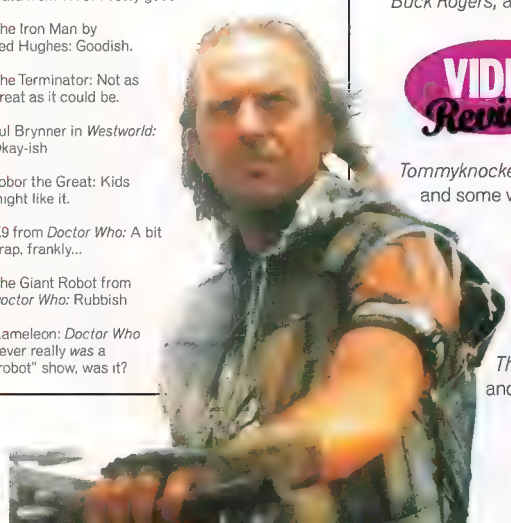
REVIEWS

The truth about Chris Priest's The Prestige and the $200 million Waterworld...

If ratings were robots, well, they'd have to be these...

Our rating system is great. But that's just our opinion. Just in case you aren't clear what it all means, though, here are a series of robot/android/cyborg analogues to give you a better idea what we're on about. (Of course, this choice is entirely SFX's own, and any contentious opinions from readers who think otherwise would be greatly appreciated...)

- A+ Robbie from *Forbidden Planet:* The best ever!
- A Maria from *Metropolis:* Wicked!
- A- R2-D2 from *Star Wars:* Lovable.
- B+ C-3PO (ditto): Almost as lovable.
- B Data from *TNG:* Pretty good
- B- The Iron Man by Ted Hughes: Goodish.
- C+ The Terminator: Not as great as it could be.
- C Yul Brynner in *Westworld:* Okay-ish
- C- Tobor the Great: Kids might like it.
- D+ K9 from *Doctor Who:* A bit crap, frankly...
- D The Giant Robot from *Doctor Who:* Rubbish
- D- Kameleon: *Doctor Who* never really was a "robot" show, was it?



FILM Reviews — PAGE 70
The Summer's SF movie boom continues, with the "Wet Max" Kevin Costner epic *Waterworld* reviewed, plus the brilliant *Apollo 13*, French weirdness in *The City of Lost Children*, and The Month in Film...

TV Reviews — PAGE 74
The latest *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine's* showing on Sky (nice beard, Siskol), plus Australian kid's SF *Escape from Jupiter*, Gil Gerard in the laughable *Buck Rogers*, and more...

VIDEO Reviews — PAGE 78
This month's stars: *Star Trek: Generations* to buy, two Stephen King mini-series (*The Stand* and *Tommyknockers*), plus *The Puppet Masters* to rent and some weird "early stuff" by Clive Barker...

BOOK Reviews — PAGE 88
Includes reviews of the long-awaited *The Diamond Age* (Neal Stephenson) and *The Prestige* (Christopher Priest)...

MODEL Reviews — PAGE 94
Brilliantly realistic original *Trek* tricorders spearhead the inevitable *Star Trek* model contingent, but for a real treat, check out what *Alien, Space: 1999* and *Blake's 7* model-man Martin Bower's been up to...

NEW MEDIA Reviews — PAGE 96
A superb new action-strategy CD-ROM for PC owners, *MechWarrior 2*, plus a review of the latest instalment in Mike Singleton's continuing *Lords of Midnight* saga in The Month in New Media...

COMIC Reviews — PAGE 98
With *Judge Dredd* on general release, the *2000AD* group has gone through one of its periodic revamps. So what's the current state of play? Plus, the re-release of Moore's *Captain Britain*...

TOSH Reviews — PAGE 100
The first batch of 1996 calendars (*Star Trek*, unsurprisingly) and some fantastic new *Star Wars* trading cards reviewed, plus the usual nonsense...

"Much of the $200 million seems to have gone into building the elaborate atoll set that hosts most of the action for the first half of the film. And very impressive it is too..."

WATERWORLD

Whatever the doomsayers may have said, Costner's epic is no waterlogged disaster

Kevin Costner *is* the mutant Mariner – a watery Clint Eastwood, his gills hidden safely away behind his ears and thinning mop.

Studio: **Universal**
Director: **Kevin Reynolds**
Starring: **Kevin Costner, Dennis Hopper, Jeanne Tripplehorn**
Cert: **12**
Running time: **135 mins**
Release: **Now showing**

Text: **Matt Bielby**

Forget the ridiculous cost, now knocking on for $200 million or so. Forget the well-documented on-set disasters, not least of which must have been the 11th hour departure of director Reynolds. Whatever horrors went on behind the scenes, the real issue at stake here is whether or not *Waterworld* is actually any cop...

It's nice to be able to write, then, that it is. It's okay. *Waterworld* makes an undeniably exciting night out, and you can certainly see where the money went. This is a good-looking and – ignoring a slightly dull period about two thirds of the way through – fast-moving film, packed with the most impressive of stunts. (Reynolds certainly likes big,

heavy objects flying at the camera at high speed. They made me duck a few times, I can tell you.)

You all know the plot, of course – the ice caps have melted, the world has flooded, and we're left with a bunch of survivors scrabbling to survive on a never-ending sea. What it all boils down to is a sort of Western, with homesteaders, bandit gangs – and Kevin Costner as The Man With No Name, who comes along and makes things right, kicking in the baddies, finding some dry land for everyone to live on, and learning to be more human in the process. The twist to it all is that our Kevin's a mutant amphibian, capable of breathing underwater and performing other superhuman feats, yet shunned by the very people he tries to protect.

Pretty simple stuff, then, but a decent enough set-up for an action adventure. As ever, Kevin Costner makes for a watchable hero – although not necessarily a likeable one. In fact, he's quite a selfish bastard during the first half, a character trait that sits uncomfortably with the general Costner screen *persona*. He's too much the 20th century boy is our Kev, and can't help coming across as far too sensible and civilised to be playing Clint Eastwood.

Unfortunately, most of the other players bring in only workmanlike performances. We've seen Dennis Hopper play bonkers villain types so many times now it's got a bit like a pantomime, with half

Ladies and gentlemen, place your bets: Costner and the Deacon (Dennis Hopper) size each other up.

the audience mouthing his lines two seconds before he says them. Leading lady Jeanne Tripplehorn comes across as a moaner (not that she hasn't got good reason), the kid is an annoying brat, and everybody else is the normal, seen-it-all-before mix of post-Apocalyptic characters – the maniacs, the crazed eccentrics, and the noble-farmer-types-trying-to-make-a-go-of-it.

So the massive amounts of cash can't have been thrown at the actors, then. Instead, much of the $200m seems to have gone into building the elaborate atoll set – a man-made island populated by the good guys – that hosts most of the action for the first half of the film. And very impressive it is too, particularly when it erupts into a massive battle early on. Unfortunately, building the thing must have been the single biggest mistake the film-makers made – what's on screen looks wonderful, but something 80% as exciting could probably have been achieved by a combination of model work and studio sets, and at a vastly reduced cost.

Better value, by far, is the Mariner's trimaran, where most of the rest of action takes place. Built by French trimaran experts Jeanneau, this remarkable craft never looks less than brilliant, has as many tricks up its sleeve as the Millennium Falcon, and moves like the wind. Costner's handling of it is impressive too.

All in all, then, you have to concede that, as an action-packed futuristic adventure romp, *Waterworld* delivers the goods. At a good quality cinema, with top sound, it'll make for a fun night out. But fun doesn't mean perfect, and with Costner's *opus* things are no different...

There are two basic problems. The first is that we've seen this film before – it was called *Max Max 2*, and it was made almost 15 years ago. *Waterworld* begins with the Max-entering-Bartertown bits from the start of the third *Max* film, *Beyond Thunderdome*, then quickly switches to the seige-and-escape-from-the-oil-refinery section from *Mad*

Costner finds himself trapped (above); an angry Helen (Jeanne Tripplehorn) and Enola (Tina Majorino) come to the rescue (left).

Eventually, of course, the Mariner, Helen and Enola come together to form a happy family...

Throughout the film, Costner commits superheroic acts that'd give Batman pause for thought – this anchor/zip-line interface being one of the saner ones...

Max 2. The rest is the Max-finding-his-own-humanity-with-the-help-of-a-cute-kid stuff from *Thunderdome*, mixed with running battles. And, er, that's about it. So much for originality. It must smart Reynolds, Costner and crew no end that George Miller has already made their film, with an equally charismatic star (Mel Gibson), and just as spectacular stunts – and for about tuppence.

The other problem is that, while *Max* comes up with a fairly believable post-Apocalyptic scavenger world, *Waterworld's* central conceit – setting the whole thing on water – renders the whole story fairly ludicrous. I hate to dwell on this too much, because the bits fudged over by the script didn't ruin the film in the same way *Judge Dredd's* stupidity marred that particular offering, but just think on these for a minute:

1. If the mutated Mariner is able to breath perfectly happily underwater and hates normal humans, why doesn't he live in the sea, instead of riding around on a boat, bartering for fresh water and so on?
2. How can a girl brought up on a man-made atoll in the middle of the sea not have learned to swim?
3. Where has everyone found the metal for their elaborate boats, atolls etc. when the whole world is flooded? Metal rusts and sinks, doesn't it?
4. Where has the Deacon's unending supply of cigarettes come from?
5. And if the bad guys are all wild, drink-crazed thugs, who's the quiet, sensible guy looking after all their jet skis, building all their weapons and so on? (It's the same problem I have with the Klingons – if they're all bad-tempered warriors, who among them ever had the patience to invent the wheel, let alone the warp drive?)
6. If the Mariner has been voyaging in his trimiran for years and years, he could easily have circumnavigated the world many times over. The idea that he'd miss an entire continent, as he apparently did, is just stretching things too far...
7. How, if the mariner's gills work just like a fish, can he suck oxygen from the water into his lungs, then use it to keep a normal human woman alive under water? Fish can't do that.
8. For that matter, where *are* all the fish? At one point, we visit a flooded city – ideal reef material, you would have thought – yet there's not a little finny friend to be seen. Which rather begs the question: What does everybody eat?

Forgive me, but if you think about any of this for more than five minutes, the whole film simply refuses to hold water.

But forget all that. Instead, put your brain in neutral and just go along for the ride. Do that and you'll have a decent enough time, of that I'm sure.

THE CITY OF LOST CHILDREN

Judith Vittet with (top) Ron Perlman, TV's "Beast."

Studio: **Lumiere/Le Studio Canal+/France 3 Cinema**
Directors: **Jean-Pierre Jeunet, Marc Caro**
Starring: **Ron Perlman, Daniel Emilfork, Judith Vittet, Jean-Claude Dreyfus**
Cert: **15**
Running time: **112 mins**
Release: **1 September**

Text: **MJ Simpson**

Krank (Daniel Emilfork) tries to cheer up the kids by dressing as Santa, to no effect.

French science fiction films have been rare since the nice M Melies hung up his camera, so it comes as something of a surprise that *La Cite Des Enfants Perdus* is really rather good, with an interesting story, fantastic characters, terrific effects and stunning production design. The fact that it's actually funny as well is even more of a shock. (That said, the surprise is rather lessened when you realise most of the people involved worked on the cult 1991 hit *Delicatessen.)*

The City of Lost Children stars Daniel Emilfork (*What's New Pussycat?*, Polanski's *Pirates*) as Krank, a mad scientist who lives on a disused oil-rig with his mother (a dwarf), "uncle" (a brain floating in a tank of chemicals), and six "brothers" (clones, all played by Dominique Pinon from *Betty Blue,* in an excellent combination of editing and effects). Krank is unable to dream, so he kidnaps small children to steal theirs – though all they have, unsurprisingly, is nightmares.

Doing Krank's dirty work among the alleyways of the city are the Cyclops, a cult of blind men equipped with Borg-like "third eyes," who drive around snatching children. One of the mites they take is Denree, younger brother of sideshow strongman One, played by former "Beast" Ron Perlman, who also starred in last year's foreign language hit, *Cronos*. One teams up with Miette, leader of a gang of juvenile criminals working for a pair of female Siamese twins. Together, they set out to rescue Denree.

All manner of influences and similarities are evident here: *Oliver Twist, Metropolis, Leon, Freaks.* But what really stands out is the incredible set design. Just as *Blade Runner* defined the look of "cyberpunk" in the public consciousness, so *The City of Lost Children* is the quintessential "steampunk" movie. Gaslights flicker among the dingy redbrick warehouses, full of brass-and-mahogany computers, while pickpocket street urchins relieve gentlemen of their hard-earned ECUs. You keep expecting Oswald Bastable and Charles Babbage to wander past, discussing difference engines and airships. Costumes by Jean-Paul Gaultier and music by Angelo *(Twin Peaks)* Badalamenti also add to the atmosphere.

City... also has more special effects than any previous French film I can think of – 17 minutes' worth, in fact – and consistently uses them in an intelligent and valid way. While Hollywood is obsessed with using gratuitous morphing techniques on every alien or monster it can find, French fx house Buf Compagnie implements the same techniques to create the best accelerated

APOLLO 13

Studio: **Universal**
Director: **Ron Howard**
Starring: **Tom Hanks, Bill Paxton, Kevin Bacon, Gary Sinise, Ed Harris**
Cert: **PG**
Running time: **140 minutes**
Release: **22 September**

Text: **MJ Simpson**

Astronauts Haise, Lovell and Swigert (Paxton, Hanks and Bacon) in training for the big day.

The biggest problem director Ron Howard faced when making *Apollo 13* was simply this – how to inject tension into a story whose outcome is already public knowledge. The events aboard the disastrous Apollo 13 mission gripped the world 25 years ago, so anybody over 35 or so is bound to remember that the three astronauts fortunately survived – and some will recall precisely how too. It's a thorny problem, but Howard gets round it in style.

The film opens with the Apollo 13 crew and their families watching the Apollo 11 crew land on the Moon. It follows their training, as Lovell, Haise and Mattingley (Hanks, Paxton and Sinise respectively) prepare to become the third lunar expedition. Two days before blast-off, Mattingley is exposed to measles, and back-up pilot Swigert (Kevin Bacon) is drafted in to take his place. Apollo 13 was eventually launched at 1.13pm on 11 April 1970. And there were no problems – until 13 April... It's this part of *Apollo 13,* up to the moment of the catastrophe, just under an hour into the film, that Howard's *opus* is at its strongest. The tension is incredible, because you know things will go wrong, yet there's absolutely nothing you can do about it.

Sure enough, an explosion rips away the side of the service module, and two oxygen tanks empty into space. Now Flight Director Gene Kranz (Ed Harris) comes into his own. From Mission Control in Houston, he and his team have to find a way to get the astronauts back to Earth alive, despite the fact that they've got inadequate power and oxygen. Switching off equipment means that the temperature drops below zero, and there's no guarantee that it'll work when it gets switched back on again.

The problems continue to mount. Every time they solve one, another rears its head. The astronauts can survive by moving into the lunar module,

(From left to right) Mad scientist Daniel Emilfork, and two of his brothers, all played by Dominique Pinon...

aging sequence I've ever seen. Another fx highlight is the trained flea, which is equipped with a detachable poisonous hypodermic needle.

Despite the subtitling, and the apparent simplicity of the characters, *City...* is an easy-to-follow, startlingly original and well-crafted story. The wise-beyond-her-years Miette contrasts nicely with One, whose strength and *naïveté* hark back to Lenny in *Of Mice and Men*. This is a fairy tale, but it's a proper fairy tale, like they used to be in the old days. Frightening, ugly adults are cruel to small children, and then receive their come-uppance through a variety of sadistic and violent deaths. It's both Grimm and grim.

The City of Lost Children is, like *Delicatessen* and *Cronos*, yet another example of how "art cinema" is finally breaking away from tedious "social realism" and producing proper movies, movies that sparkle with the magic of pure cinema and use the medium to take us to places we can never visit, meet people we can never meet. *City...* shows that a film can be finely crafted and artistic, but at the same time tremendously entertaining and enjoyable. It won't get as wide a distribution as a *Batman* or a *Judge Dredd*, but it's worth searching out – the superb production design will lose a lot on video, after all.

Which way is up? Ron Howard's zero G filming sessions caused a few stomach evacuations.

but it 's only been designed to take two men for two days, not three men for four days. "I'll just hold my breath, then?" suggests Swigert.

This is one of the great stories of human ingenuity, co-operation, and – above all – tenacity. "Failure is not an option," asserts Kranz. There's a very human aspect, as you'd expect from director Howard *(Cocoon, Splash)*, as Lovell's family follow the story, and the disappointed Mattingley comes into his own, running countless simulations to try and find some way of tweaking a few extra amps of power from the available equipment. The movie never drags, and rarely, if ever, becomes sentimental. All the performances are excellent – even Hanks' – and James Horner's powerful orchestral score is the best I've heard for years.

It seems almost incidental that the effects are excellent – but, remarkably, there's not a frame of original NASA footage to be seen here. And all the scenes set in zero G were filmed... in zero G, aboard a NASA plane in freefall.

I searched long and hard to find a fault with *Apollo 13*. The best I can come up with is that there's little sense of how primitive the equipment was in 1970, but that's barely relevant. As far as I'm concerned, this is the best film of the past few years, no contest.

Rian Hughes

The month in FILM

GENRE CELLULOID DOING THE CINEMA CIRCUIT, PLUS COMING SOON FOR AUTUMN, AND THE LATEST TOP TEN.

Still playing

BATMAN FOREVER

Warner Bros

Bat-director: **Joel Schumacher**
Starring: **Val Kilmer, Tommy Lee Jones, Jim Carrey, Nicole Kidman, Chris O'Donnell**
Bat-cert: **PG**
Running Bat-time: **122 mins**
Bat-text: **MJ Simpson**

If you were expecting a continuation of Tim Burton's brooding gothicism, you'll be in for a shock here – Joel Schumacher has reinvented the Dark Knight yet again. This movie is much more "comic book" in style, with death-defying stunts and its tongue wedged firmly in its big budget cheek.

Val Kilmer is excellent as both Batman and Bruce Wayne – he looks great in a tuxedo, and the Bat-suit shows off his bum to perfection. He acts well too, which helps. As usual, however, it's the bad guys who have the most fun, with Jim Carrey perfectly cast as mad scientist-turned-supervillain the Riddler, and Tommy Lee Jones great as the lawyer-turned-vengeful maniac Two-Face.

"Is that a Batarang under your cape, or are you just pleased to see me?"

The only real weak point is that Schumacher's direction gets a bit out of hand in the frenetic action sequences – but at least there's enough characterisation to fill out the simple plot. All in all, great fun.

Stallone mumbles through the disappointing *Judge Dredd*.

JUDGE DREDD

Cinergi/Guild

Director: **Danny Cannon**
Starring: **Sylvester Stallone, Armand Assante, Diane Lane**
Cert: **15**
Running time: **95 mins**
Text: **Matt Bielby**

A crushing disappointment, *Judge Dredd* fails to work properly as either an adaptation of the cult *2000AD* comic character or a futuristic action movie. It's not even very good as a Stallone vehicle.

The big problem is the script – a plodding, logic-free affair, which removes 50% of Dredd's patent bastardishness, and replaces it with nothing very much at all. Couple this with Stallone's normal vacuity and you get a big hole at the middle of the film where the star should be. Sure, the effects, sets and so on range from the merely good to the exceptional – there are some stunning shots which just about justify the price of admission on their own – but whenever anyone actually starts talking, things crash to earth with a bump.

Director Danny Cannon should be congratulated for struggling with what was doubtless a logistical nightmare (it was his first mega-budget blockbuster project), but he still needs to develop a style of his own.

Coming soon

Candyman 2: Farewell to the Flesh **22 September**
The return of Tony Todd...

Mortal Kombat **20 October**
Christopher Lambert plays a computer game character.

Johnny Mnemonic **11 November**
Keanu Reeves! W lliam Gibson! Dead good! (Probably...)

Goldeneye **22 November**
Bond is back! And it's about bloody time, too.

CONGO

UIP

Director: **Frank Marshall**
Starring: **Dylan Walsh, Tim Curry, Ernie Hudson** (the black guy from *Ghostbusters...*)
Cert: **12**
Running time: **108 mins**
Text: **Dave Golder**

A severe lack of ape action and a more severe lack of a decent plot are the main problems with this *Indiana Jones* meets *Predator* hybrid. Tension and logic give way to cheap laughs as the heroes (and villain) trek interminably across Africa and meet a bunch of hyper-intelligent primates.

Spectacular effects and some of the best men-in-suit apes to date (though they're still not that convincing) also help, but this is still hollow and unmemorable stuff (unlike Tim Curry's Rumanian accent, which is so excruciatingly bad it'll have you gritting your teeth).

SF Movie Box Office

Apollo 13 Blasts Off!

During its initial two-week stint at the top of the US box office charts, Ron Howard's true-life space adventure has taken over $70 million, pushing the Dark Knight down to second place. Joe Dredd is holding his own, just about, having opened at number 5. Meanwhile, ***School Ghost Stories*** (whatever that is) has made enough on the Japanese domestic market to make it into the global top ten. Bubbling just under the Top 10 are ***Ed Wood*** and a reissue of Disney's fabulous ***Sleeping Beauty***, both of which are doing very well in Europe.

The SFXclusive Top Ten SF Films

1. **Apollo 13** (US) Universal
2. **Batman Forever** (US) Warner Brothers
3. **Species** (US) MGM/UA
4. **Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers** (US) Fox
5. **Judge Dredd** (US) Buena Vista
6. **Casper** (US) Paramount
7. **Congo** (US) Universal
8. **The Indian in the Cupboard** (US) Paramount
9. **Street Fighter** (US) Columbia Tristar
10. **School Ghost Stories** (Japan) Toho

"*DS9* has the potential to develop into one of the best SF shows ever, but it doesn't take chances."

DEEP SPACE NINE

SEASON THREE

Boldly going not much further than it did before, Deep Space Nine's third season fails to impress

Rene Auberjonois comes more into his own as security chief Odo in *DS9*'s recent shows.

Production company: **Paramount**
Producer: **Rick Berman/Mike Piller**
Starring: **Avery Brooks, Nana Visitor, Rene Auberjonois, Colm Meany, Armin Shimerman**
Showing: **Sky One, Sundays, 3pm & 9pm**

Text: **Dave Golder**

So Paramount is promising big changes to *DS9* in season four. Strange, I could have sworn they said the same about season three. There seems to be an air of desperation about *DS9*, which, despite a spattering of truly great individual episodes, still hasn't got into its stride, or settled down to a winning formula.

The changes made to season three (currently halfway through its run on Sky One) were neither bold or fundamental enough to make much difference to the casual viewer. And when I say fundamental, I don't mean axing or replacing characters, but a realisation that what the show really needs is more than cosmetic tweaks – it needs exciting *and* original plots.

The new ship, the Defiant, for example, was introduced to get the crew off the station more often, the idea being that many were getting bored of the same few locations. Problem is, the ship's rarely used, and looks like a metal tortoise anyway. Hardly exciting stuff.

The threat from the Dominion has also failed to live up to expectations. We keep getting told how hard they are, but they never come across as at all threatening. Because they're always skulking around in the background manipulating events, it's almost like the Federation are fighting against a race of tiresome intergalactic civil servants. It doesn't help that their henchmen, The Jem'Hadar, are also dull.

Cardassians have been coming in all shapes and waist sizes this season.

"I knew I should have kept that stock of Preparation H," muses Julian.

"Distant Voices" was a *Voyager* crossover episode. Did someone mention desperate marketing ploy?

both in terms of make-up and characterisation – and certainly not a patch on the Borg.

So, since none of these new elements has helped inject much more excitement into the show, it's pretty much business as usual – comedy Quark episodes ("The House of Quark"), interminable Bajoran politics ("Life Support"), too many cringeworthy professions of love (Meridian in "Heart of Stone") and too few meaty plots.

Only "Civil Defence," in which DS9's Cardassian defence system comes to the fore, the two-part time travel tale "Past Tense" and the Klingon/Ferengi courtroom drama "The House of Quark" made an impression. "The Abandoned" is also pretty good, as long as you haven't seen the identical *TNG* episode "I, Borg."

But despite the good points, there are still too many filler episodes, with skimpy plots, little action and too much cod high emotion. Sure, it's good to have character-based drama, but on *DS9* it's hokey, simplistic, and ultimately embarrassing.

DS9 has the potential, and the characters, to develop into one of the best SF shows ever. But it doesn't take many chances and constantly sells itself short, opting for tried and trusted *Trek* formulas, and then not doing them well enough. Shame, really.

C+

ESCAPE FROM JUPITER

Production company: **Film Australia**
Starring: **Anna Choy, Steve Bisley**
Showing: **BBC 1, Thursdays, 5.05pm**

Text: **John Gosling**

Those who've already caught sight of *Escape from Jupiter* will know from the opening credits that it's something special. After all, it begins with what has to be one of the most impressive sfx sequences ever for a science fiction TV series. Swooping down on the surface of Io (a moon of Jupiter), we penetrate the sulphurous clouds, skim across the volcanic surface, and dive down into a ravine, where, clinging precariously to the sides, we discover signs of human habitation. The whole sequence is an awesome piece of animation by the Queensland-based company Photon Stockman, who've also worked on big US shows like *Time Trax*.

But it's not just the effects that give *Escape from Jupiter* its quality edge. This is a children's drama *par excellence*, where all the troubles that imperil the cast are, naturally enough, the fault of stupid adults. In this case, drilling into the core of Io for mineral deposits has resulted in a calamitous blowout, which forces the survivors to flee to KL5, a ramshackle spacestation abandoned almost a decade ago. Faced with the choice of waiting for rescue and possibly running out of vital supplies, or flying the technically unspaceworthy KL5 back to earth, the adults elect to risk the perilous journey home, despite the protests of Duffy (Steve Bisley).

Despite some bare-looking sets, *Escape from Jupiter* has a quality feel to it – much more so than *Doctor Who*. The stunning computer-animated sfx probably have a lot to do with that...

the pompous colony director and officious foil to the child stars.

If you've been waiting to hear how awful the kids are, think again – all put in credible performances, with 14 year old Anna Choy as the visiting rich girl, now faced with hard times, particularly good. Top marks to the two youngest members of the cast too.

Production values are also top rate. In fact, effects, acting and direction are so good, the first episode is virtually indistinguishable from your average "adult" episode of televised SF, and the script's certainly better than anything the much missed *Doctor Who* managed in its final years. Later episodes become slightly more kiddy, true enough, but they're never schmaltzy for all that. And while the kids are misunderstood by the adults with laughable regularity – and poor Duffy gets hit in the face far too often by assorted varieties of gunk – there's subtle humour to be enjoyed from the well-observed dialogue too.

Escape from Jupiter has recently finished its initial run on BBC 1, but fans will be pleased to hear that there's a novelisation available from BBC Books, and a movie length compilation out on the Gogglebox label. This essentially features the first and last few episodes, framed by some savagely cut mid-series stories. It might sound terrible, but, in fact, comes highly recommended. The opening and closing episodes are the best of the lot anyway.

B+

BUCK ROGERS IN THE 25TH CENTURY: SEASON TWO

Production Company: **Universal**
The Man Responsible: **John Mantley**
Starring: **Gil Gerard, Erin Gray, Thom Christopher**
Showing: **BBC 2, Mondays, 6pm**

Text: **Dave Golder**

Impossible as it may sound, season two of *Buck Rogers* is actually *worse* than its predecessor. With a new producer, a new format (not that the first season actually *had* a format) and new characters, this second outing underwent a complete overhaul – and the inspiration behind the changes was obvious. This was more like Gene Roddenberry's *"Wagon Train* to the stars" idea than *Star Trek* ever was.

Not that that should have been much of a surprise to anyone back in 1980, when the second season first aired. After all, the new producer, John Mantley, was a self-confessed SF illiterate who had previously worked on shows like *Gunsmoke*. It's not known whether he was called in specifically to give the show a more Western feel or whether it "just happened," but it was clearly a recipe for disaster.

The changes were extensive too. Out went Doctor Huer and Doctor Theopolis, to be replaced by the bumblingly camp Admiral Asimov (Jay Garner), the just plain bumbling Doctor Goodfellow (Wilfred Hyde-White), the alien Hawk (Thom Christopher) and the lamp-post-like robot Crichton (whose neck uncannily foreshadowed ET). More importantly, the new cast was taken off the future Earth of the first season, and put on an Enterprise-esque spaceship, The Searcher. Their mission: Woolly, boundary-free, and packed with SF clichés.

The new characters were all dreadful, with the arguable exception of birdman Hawk – at least he brought with him a certain edge, and an impressive bird-of-prey fightership. But Thom Christopher, who played the alien with all the energy of a dodo, never took the role any further than glowering and grimacing, and buddying around wth Buck. Perhaps the idea was to bring in a crew that'd make Gil Gerard and Erin Gray look better and more professional; strangely, it works.

To be fair, it's not all bad. The series starts off promisingly with "Time of the Hawk," a two-part introductory story for Thom Christopher. It boasts some impressive effects and a competent plot, even if it is just a Western in SF trappings. Sadly, subsequent stories just get sillier, descending into the very worst kind of kiddie sci-fi. Low points include "The Golden Man" (did anybody think seriously how about how these people give birth?), the risible attempts at comedy in "Shgoratchx!" (Buck Rogers and The Seven Dwarves) and "The Satyr," in which Gerard sprouts horns. High points? Er, when Twiki gets his original voice back. Says it all, really.

D+

Twiki lost his voice at the start of season two – sort of. Actually, it was replaced by something a bit less like Bugs Bunny, but after complaints the Mel Blanc voice returned.

Hawk was one of the not-too-bad additions to the season two cast, mainly because he had a great ship.

The month in TV

IN A SUMMER DEVOID OF DECENT SF ON THE BOX, WE CHECK OUT ANOTHER MTV ODDITY AND AN ANCIENT US SITCOM TO DISCOVER ANY WORTHWHILE GENRE TV. AND FIND, ER, NOT MUCH TO SHOUT ABOUT REALLY...

MORK & MINDY

Paramount

Starring: **Robin Williams, Pam Dawber**
Showing: **Channel 4 at various times**
Text: **MJ Simpson**

Channel 4 is currently giving us another chance to see all 93 episodes of this fondly remembered SF sitcom. It's part of a tradition of outsider-observes-human-race shows which also includes *Small Wonder*, *My Favourite Martian*, *Metal Mickey*, and *ALF*, but only the last one could come close to the best *Mork & Mindy* episodes.

The character of Mork from Ork originated in an episode of *Happy Days*, after the producer's nine year old son, having watched *Star Wars*, suggested to his father that the Fonz and gang should meet an alien. The episode generated so many letters that a series was inevitable, updating Mork from the '50s to the present day (1978), although Fonzie did appear in the pilot.

Robin Williams, who rapidly made the show his own, had appeared briefly on *Laugh-In* and *The Richard Pryor Show*, but was otherwise new to television. Pam Dawber had been second choice for the lead role in the inferior *Bewitched* sequel *Tabitha*.

The best *Mork & Mindy* episodes are the early ones, which starred Conrad Janis and Elizabeth Kerr as Mindy's father and grandmother, who ran a music store. Later, the characters were replaced by Remo and Jean da Vinci (Jay Thomas and Gina Hecht) who ran a deli. By the time Jonathan Winters (Williams' boyhood hero) was introduced as Mork and Mindy's "baby" Mearth, the show was well past its sell-by date, and the US Nielsen ratings were plummeting.

Eventually, *Mork & Mindy* was taken off-air with the final three episodes filmed but unscreened. These tell the story of how Mork reveals himself to the Earth authorities as an alien. They were restored when the series went to syndication, and C4 showed them the last time it repeated the series. Bizarrely, the penultimate episode was filmed in 3D.

At its best, *Mork & Mindy* combined a great script with knockabout comedy, good characterisation and a strong-but-unobtrusive moral message; some individual episodes would get an A-. Mind you, as a US sitcom purist, I much preferred *Laverne & Shirley*...

B

THE HEAD

Creator/producer: **Eric Fogle**
Starring: **A few 1,000 plastic animation cells**
Showing: **MTV, Fridays, 10.30pm**
Text: **Dave** (Haven't I got anything better to do than watch TV and videos?) **Golder**

When you look at the MTV schedules and see something called *The Head* being broadcast in its oddities slot, you might assume that dodgy old *Monkees* film was doing the rounds again. You know, the one which looked like everybody involved was partaking of the weed while they were making it, and ended up one of the oddest celluloid undertakings ever (the clip accompanying *The Porpoise Song* makes the ending of *2001* look like a trip on the Metropolitan line).

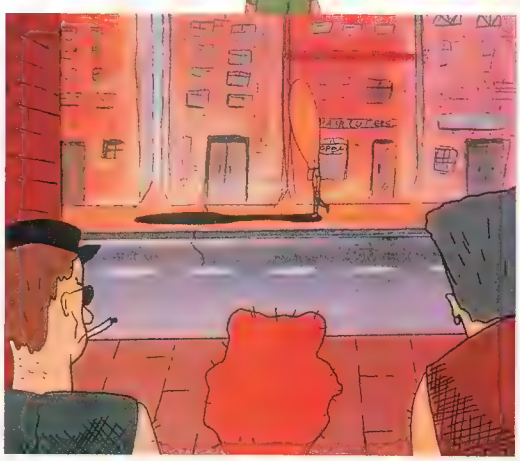
But no. That was *Head*. This is *The Head*. And, oddly enough, it's even more bizarre. The latest cult animation show from the US to be picked up in Europe by the channel that first brought you the irrepressible *Beavis and Butthead*, this is a blackly comic SF tale that looks like it should be funny, but doesn't actually have any jokes.

Spanning 14 episodes (MTV shows them two at a time, with ad breaks in the weirdest of places - like, not between the episodes), *The Head* deals with an attempted alien invasion of Earth. Ordinary, everyday US Joe Jim gets dragged into the plot when an alien called Roy takes up residence in his head, expanding it to monumental proportions as a result.

Along with a mutant band of misfits, who look like leftovers from Clive Barker's *Nightbreed* (man-with-lawnmower-blade-buried-in-head is particularly wince-inducing), our heroes set out to save the planet from a bunch of similar head-inhabiting aliens who aren't quite as friendly as the cephalically challenged Roy.

The Head is undoubtedly an acquired taste. With deliberately crude animation, the lack of anything that you could actually call a joke, and a barely coherent storyline stuffed with weirdly nasty elements, it's not something you'll fall in love with straight away. But its unrelenting off-the-wall-ness and bizarre cast of characters will definitely win it fans. I can't see it challenging *Beavis and Butthead* as a cult classic, but if an animated cross between *Buckeroo Banzai* and *Brain Damage* sounds your bag, check it out before it gets *too* popular.

B



"I am not a hot air balloon, I am a human being!" Jim has to face the prejudice of a society that finds aliens living in your brain unnatural.

Coming soon

Blockbuster film premières from the Autumn schedules
Because the BBC seems neurotically scared of revealing schedules until about a week before things are due out, we haven't got any dates for the following films. Suffice to say, they'll all be getting their terrestrial first showings on Aunty this Autumn. The line-up includes *Death Becomes Her*, *Fire in the Sky*, *Freejack*, *Highlander* (yes, the first time on network TV), *Memoirs of an Invisible Man* and *Timescape*. Omnibus will also be showing a profile of *RoboCop*/*Total Recall* director Paul Verhoeven.

Space: 1999
Bravo — **September; Tues & Thurs, 8pm, Sat & Sun, 1pm**
The most unscientific basis for an SF series ever (just *how* fast is the moon supposed to be moving?), but exceptional production values and some tautly-written episodes make it worth a look.

Doctor Who
UK Gold — **September weekdays, around noon**
Tom Baker takes over as the Doctor and heralds one of the greatest periods in the history of the programme (just don't tune in for his first story, "Robot," that's all).

The Stand
Sky One — **24-29 September 9pm**
The entire million-hour Stephen King TV mini-series, in which a plague kills off everybody apart from a few B-grade actors who can't get roles on the big screen any more, and Gary Sinese. (Actually, this adaptation is great – and a good deal better than the disappointing *Tommyknockers* mini-series.)

SF TV Top Ten

Scraping the Barrel, Again...

The Outer Limits is way out in front this month (which is a sad indication of the state of current TV SF), but the battle for the runners-up position is hotting up (well, lukewarming up at any rate). The last few episodes of ***Babylon 5*** (which, of course, haven't even been shown in the US yet) put up a spirited challenge against Beeb 2's ***The Next Generation***. As for the rest of the chart... Christ, we're talking barrel bottoms and scraping as far as the terrestrials go, what with *Knight Rider* and *Buck Rogers* clammering for attention. Meanwhile on Sky One, ***The X-Files*** is still doing well, but *DS9* has dropped out of its top ten.

The SFXclusive UK Top Ten SF TV Programmes

1. **The Outer Limits** (BBC 2)
2. **Star Trek: The Next Generation** (BBC 2)
3. **Babylon 5** (Channel 4)
4. **Buck Rogers in the 25th Century** (BBC 2)
5. **Knight Rider** (ITV)
6. **Escape from Jupiter** (BBC 1)
7. **Power Rangers** (GMTV)
8. **The X-Files** (Sky One)
9. **Classic The X-Files** (Sky One)
10. **Star Trek: Deep Space Nine** (Sky One)

the UFO Files

and paranormal phenomena

Alien abduction

Official cover-ups

Paranormal phenomena

SEE THE EVIDENCE

DECIDE FOR YOURSELF

In all good video stockists now

"Shatner hams things up brilliantly – but poor Stewart, despite acting his heart out, actually comes across as irritatingly stuffy and a bit wet."

STAR TREK: GENERATIONS

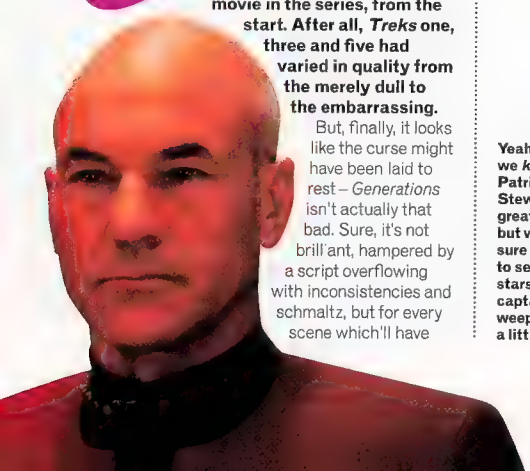
De-Generation, more like. Picard's crew lose out heavily to that old ham, Shatner

Distributor: **CIC Video**
Director: **David Carson**
Starring: **William Shatner, Patrick Stewart, Brent Spiner**
Cert: **PG**
Release: **Out now** (rental)
Running time: **113 mins**

Text: **Jonathan Norton**

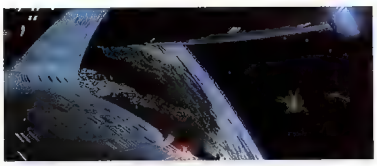
Has the curse of the odd-numbered *Star Trek* movies struck again? The omens weren't good for the *Next Generation* crew's first big screen adventure, the seventh movie in the series, from the start. After all, *Treks* one, three and five had varied in quality from the merely dull to the embarrassing.

But, finally, it looks like the curse might have been laid to rest – *Generations* isn't actually that bad. Sure, it's not brill'ant, hampered by a script overflowing with inconsistencies and schmaltz, but for every scene which'll have



Picard tries to work out the course of the Nexus while Data has a nervous breakdown.

Yeah, sure, we *know* Patrick Stewart is a great actor, but we're not sure we want to see our starship captains weeping like a little girl.



Soren (Malcolm McDowell) orders the Nexus to annihilate a few more worlds before tea-time.

you reaching for the fast forward button, there'll be a couple here to enjoy.

This is, of course, the film where Picard and Shatner finally get to meet each other. In "the past," Kirk is involved in an accident during the maiden voyage of the Enterprise C, and gets swallowed up by a ribbon of energy called The Nexus, presumed dead. A few decades later, the Nexus reappears, and a scientist called Soren seems determined to change its course no matter what the cost – even if it means destroying entire planets. When the *Next Generation* Enterprise embarks on a mission to prevent him, Picard also finds himself engulfed by the Nexus...

One of the main problems with the film is also its main asset – Shatner. His presence might have been a Paramount marketing manager's dream, but it also seriously unbalances the movie. Aside from Picard and Data (who's involved in a laboured sub-plot in which he finally gets to show emotions), none of the *TNG* lot get much to do, and end up looking a pretty bland bunch, unlikely to be able to carry a whole series of films alone.

Shatner, on the other hand, is in top form, and the script has clearly been specially tailored to suit his (lack of) talents. But while he hams things up brilliantly – and reminds you why the original series was so popular (familiar characters acting in familiar ways, week in, week out) – poor Stewart, acting his heart out, actually comes across as irritatingly stuffy and a bit wet.

Humanising Data was also a mistake, not least because it enabled Brent Spiner to overact outrageously. Viewers who aren't *au fait* with *TNG* aren't really going to give a monkeys about an android gaining emotions, while fans will be disappointed that one of their fave crew members is acting totally out of character. Bad decision – almost as bad as the fact that the film's high quality photography highlights Spiner's gold-painted android skin for what it really is.

But if the heroes disappoint, the villains certainly do not. Apart from Malcolm McDowell's remarkably understated performance as the obsessive Soren, the film also sees the return of the delightfully perverse Klingon sisters Lursa and B'Etor from the TV series, who don't so much chew up the scenery as swallow it whole. Their reaction to seeing Beverly Crusher loom up on their ship's main screen ("hideous") is a great comic moment.

As with much *Star Trek,* then, it's the humour and the action that keep the ham-fisted plot afloat. The pace only occasionally flags, and the movie's punctuated by some truly outstanding effects sequences (notwithstanding a few stock shots), a number of well-timed battle scenes and plenty of wry little moments, mainly provided by the self-effacing Shatner. Every time it looks like the story's about to get swamped in its own pretensions and ludicrousness, something neat happens to win you back.

So how good is it? From a fan's point of view, it's disappointing, with the *Next Generation* crew getting a pretty rum deal. For the non-fan, it's burdened by too many fan-only *Trek* references, corny scenes of overly-simplistic high emotion, and self-indulgent cod-moralising (the usual *Trek* stuff, in other words). But it has its moments. Quite a lot of them, in fact. It's the sort of movie where images like the Enterprise crashlanding will stay in your mind long after you've stopped worrying about why, if Picard could have left the Nexus at any time, he decided to leave in such a stupidly impractical manner?

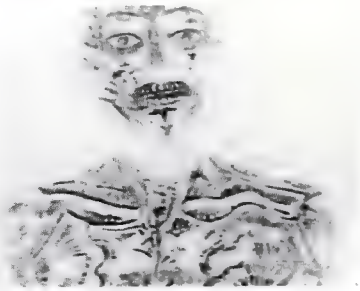
CLIVE BARKER'S "SALOME" & "THE FORBIDDEN"

Distributor: **Redemption Video**
Director: **Clive Barker**
Starring: **Clive Barker, Pete Atkins, Doug Bradley**
Cert: **18**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **72 mins**
Price: **£12.99**

Text by: **Dave Golder**

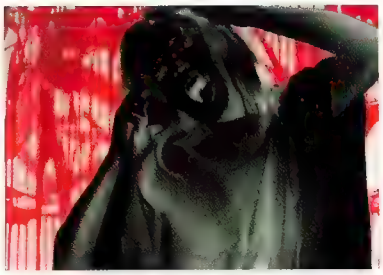
While other teenagers were locking themselves in their bedrooms and writing poetry about love, suicide, and the genius of Roger Waters, a 19 year old Clive Barker was using his Super-8 camera to make odd Kenneth Anger-inspired, silent, black-and-white movies in the basement of a flower shop in Liverpool.

For a long time, these films were for the eyes of Barker's family and friends only, but now the writer has agreed to unleash them on a public not so much unsuspecting as happy in ignorance. I say



It's very fortunate Super-8 film is so grainy, – otherwise one of the pictures above would never have made it onto the sleeve... (That should get you squinting.)

Some of the effects, like the skinned man at the end of *The Forbidden*, are very crude but surprisingly effective.



that, because these short films are neither easy going or particularly entertaining. What they *are* is powerful and intriguing – and not just because they show brief flashes of ideas and themes which would later crop up in films like *Hellraiser.*

Of course, it's not all good. For every strong image there are examples of terrible self indulgence, and the unsubtle homoerotic imagery may put some off. What it boils down to is that you can admire Barker's resourcefulness and embryonic film-making abilities, but still find it hard to like the movies.

As Barker points out in the interview which follows the films on tape, what he was interested in at the time was provoking a reaction, and he certainly does that. Also interviewed are Doug Bradley (Pinhead from the *Hellraiser* movies) and Pete Atkins (writer of the *Hellraiser* sequels) who, along with Barker, actually appear in the films.

So is this tape of interest to anyone except hard-core Barker fans and film students? Probably not. But Redemption should still be congratulated on releasing them, because they do provide a disturbing insight into the mind of one of today's leading *horrormeisters.*

THE PUPPET MASTERS

FBI agent Donald Sutherland (above) watches as his son (right) has to cope with an alien taking over his mind...

Distributor: **Buena Vista**
Director: **Stuart Orme**
Starring: **Donald Sutherland, Eric Thal, Julie Warner**
Cert: **18**
Release: **5 September** (rental)
Running time: **108 mins**

Text: **Dave Golder**

It's weird what makes it to the big screen in the UK and what gets consigned to rental purgatory... Okay, so *The Puppet Masters* is no masterpiece, but it's still a damn sight better than some of the dross that does get a cinema release nowadays.

Basically, *The Puppet Masters* is yet another take on *Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* starting with the classic scenario of aliens taking over a small town in the US heartland. The gimmick this time is that the aliens, which look like a cross between manta rays and the facehugger from *Alien,* cling to the victim's back and send tendrils into their brain to achieve mind control. A mere half

hour into the film, the aliens are attempting to assassinate the President – which is the kind of thing that usually provides the climax to these sort of films. *The Puppet Masters,* however, just keeps on going, pushing its admittedly clichéd premise to the utmost, and providing a number of chillingly entertaining moments *en route.*

A fast-moving monster romp that often sacrifices tension for gory effects and humour, *The Puppet Masters* remains one of the wittier and better directed straight-to-video shockers released recently.

PIONEERING

JAPANESE ELECTRONICS GIANT PIONEER HAS SLOWLY BUT SURELY BEEN MAKING IN-ROADS INTO THE UK ANIME MARKET, BEING THE FIRST JAPANESE COMPANY TO SELL ITS OWN ANIME IN THE UK. WILL OVERTON FORGETS ALL ABOUT HI-FI AND TV, AND ASSESSES THE STORY SO FAR...

In *Moldiver*, happy is the girl who owns her own power suit. A large bow makes all the difference.

Moldiver (PG) **(two 30-minute episodes) £12.99** B
Kishin Heidan (12) **(two 30-minute episodes) £12.99** A

Distributor: **Pioneer LDCE**
Text: **Wil Overton**

To most people, Pioneer means TVs, hi-fis, video recorders – that sort of thing. But to Japanese animation fans – of which I'm proud to be one – the name conjures up images of small rabbits that grow up to be spaceships, young girls in power suits and 50 foot high, steel-riveted robots. Let me explain...

The first thing to make clear is, yes, we *are* talking about the same Pioneer here. Since 1984, the Japanese audio-visual giant has made a concerted attempt to enter Britain's Japanese animation market, and has had measured success selling titles that don't rely on the nastier excesses of the medium. The interesting thing is that its animation-related activities don't begin and end with buying in anime and selling it on – in Japan, the company is actively involved in producing new material for release on its Pioneer LDC (Laser Disc Company) label, as well as creating new series for television. Showing the speed with which these things can be done, the US has recently had a video release of its newest TV series (which only appeared on Japanese TV this Spring) *El Hazard: The Magnificent World,* as well as the traditional samurai story *The Hakkenden.*

In the rather smaller (but surprisingly saturated) UK anime market, things move at a more sedate pace, but even here – from the eco-adventure of *Green Legend Ran* to the mega-Japanese hit *Tenchi Muyo! Ryo-Ohki* – Pioneer's anime output is varied, and full of surprises.

In an effort to get British women interested in anime, one of the first UK releases was *Moldiver,* which concerned itself with gently taking the mickey out of Western superheroes – the plot has the less than confident Hitoshi spend all his spare time inventing a super suit, then having his sister Mirai discover it, decide its macho appearance is just too much, and make a few design improvements of her own... Thus, Moldiver is born. True enough, Mirai does sometimes use the suit for less than heroic purposes (like making a trip to see her favourite pop singer in the

TOKYO
THE LAST MEGALOPOLIS

Distributor: **Manga Live**
Director: **Akio Jissoji**
Starring: **Shinatro Katsu, Kyusaku Shimada, Mieko Harada**
Cert: **15**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **102 minutes**
Price: **£13.99**

Text: **Jeremy Clarke**

Aside from a disappointing final episode, the four-part anime *Doomed Megalopolis* boasted lush visuals, strong characters and a gripping plot. Even the dubbing was above average.

Expectations were therefore riding high for this live action version. In 1912 and the decade after, evil black magician Kato sought to awaken the spirit of Masakado, whose death forged a Utopia seven centuries earlier and made him Tokyo's legendary guardian spirit. However, Kato's despotic plans to use Masakado to raze Tokyo to the ground soon met with opposition from assorted priests and psychics...

While Toho Studios has brilliantly recreated the look of the characters from the original anime, and the period Tokyo setting is impressive, the dubbing is atrocious and the okay performances suffer as a result. The sfx are sometimes bizarre too. C

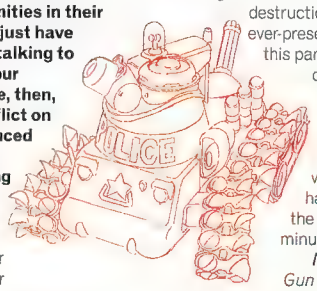
ANIME WORLDS

Angel Cop 4 (18) **(30 mins) £5.99** B
New Dominion Tank Police Act 9 (PG) **(28 mins) £5.99** B
Macross Plus Part 3 (PG) **(42 mins) £8.99** C

Distributor: **Manga Entertainment Ltd**
Text: **Wil Overton**

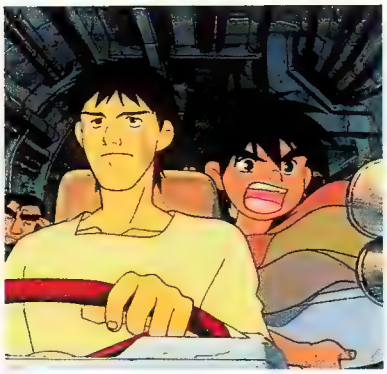
Apparently, the Japanese don't have any profanities in their language – they just have different ways of talking to you, depending on your social standing. Just imagine, then, the humiliation you could inflict on an insane, psychically enhanced killer who's about to rip your head off if you started talking to them as if they were a spotty ten year old...

Er, no. I can't either – and neither, I suspect, could whoever supplied the translated script for *Angel Cop 4.* Obviously thinking that such a situation would call for some pretty heavy-duty swearing, they duly obliged by adding a well chosen colloquialism every second or third word. Apart from that, it's the usual mayhem and gore, as the Special Security Force are mown down by the aforementioned insane psychic killer, who's decided that it's not only her duty to rid Japan of undesirable terrorists, but everyone else as well. Toting only a gun with enough recoil to break an arm, can Angel stop the slaughter? You bet she can! This isn't any better or worse than previous instalments, rattles along at a cracking pace, and creates a suitably moody atmosphere. If nothing else, it proves that having super ESP is no guarantee of good dress sense.



Elsewhere, in the bright and cheery future which anime directors have obviously decided Japan is heading for, the pollution-ridden Newport City, home to the ***Dominion Tank Police***, is up to its ears in a crime spree. In *Act 9,* someone has kindly broken the local prison wide open and let all the inmates out for a break. Of course, the Big Nasty Corporation™ is up to its nefarious plans again, and this time it's trying to stop the Mayor from passing an anti-weapons bill. Unlike *Angel Cop,* though, *Dominion* does inject its tanks and destruction with some light relief. The ever-present Puma Twins spend most of this particular episode stuck to the front of top cop Leona's tank. The rather weak attempt at political intrigue fails more because of the limited running time than anything else – it's as if the writers suddenly realised they had no time left and wrapped up the whole plot in the last five minutes. For *Dominion* converts only.

Macross Plus is basically *Top Gun* with knobs on. If you haven't



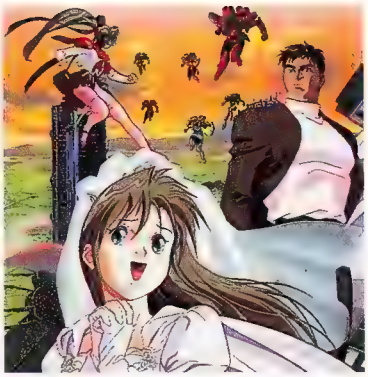
***Green Legend Ran* is rather cringingly described as an "eco-adventure." But don't let that put you off.**

States!), but she comes through once the mysterious Dr Machinegal pops up – with his bevy of beautiful androids – to make trouble.

It's the decision to concentrate on off-beat stories and anime with twists that makes so much of Pioneer's output stand apart from the usual sci-fi and monsters we see here in the West. Even when we *do* get to see giant robots, they're not the typical *Transformer* lookalikes, but hulking rivet-laden behemoths. It takes an army of mechanics to get propellers whirring, generators working and things actually going in the latest UK Pioneer release, *Kishin Heidan*, for instance, the plot throwing these giant retro robots into an alternative history, *circa* 1941 – complete with Eva Braun and Albert Einstein! There's even a '40s series cliffhanger feel to the seven-part *Heidan*, with trailers for the next episode introduced by spinning newspaper headlines such as "Kishin Express In Danger!"

In the States, *Kishin Heidan* is also available on Laser Disc in a subtitled format, with the original Japanese language soundtrack. The subbing vs dubbing argument is one that's been raging for as long as anime fandom's been around, so it's good to see at least one company trying to keep both camps happy. After all, the task of translating a Japanese series into English can be fraught with problems – even the title of *Tenchi Muyo!* is a Japanese play on words and, depending who you listen to, can be read as either "This side up," "No need for Tenchi" or "Good for nothing Tenchi." This six part action-comedy, about a young boy who accumulates more than his fair share of intergalactic female guests, contains plenty of Japanese cultural references for its translators to try and get around. While it's always going to be purely a matter of personal taste as to whether you like your anime Westernised, Pioneer's American-style dubbing generally handles things pretty well, avoiding the stilted acting and pregnant pauses that can arise if you try to exactly match lip movements to speech; something that, funnily enough, the Japanese themselves don't actually bother to do.

Young, bright and now super-human, fun-loving Mirai dons the "Mol" suit (right) more for a bit of a laugh than anything.



Finding time to win over your ideal man can be a real chore when you're a superheroine in *Moldiver*.

Pioneer LDCE (LDC's European arm) is the first Japanese, anime producer to release its own products in the West, which has to be a significant step forward. If you like your anime action-packed, but without the gore or the profanities, take a look at what the company has to offer. It's definitely well above average fare.

seen any of the other series bearing the *Macross* name, don't worry – the links between them and *Macross Plus* are tenuous to say the least. The meal we have here is a love triangle, consisting of a hot-shot human pilot, a singer and an alien half-breed. Add a liberal dash of experimental fighter spaceships and spice with a computerised pop singer who's just become self-aware (I sing Japanese pop songs, therefore I am).

The problem is, apart from some wonderfully observed flight sequences, *Macross Plus* relies mainly on its character interaction to save the day – a task that, sadly, the English voice actors can't quite carry off. Definitely *not* an impulse buy.

With just three releases this month, Manga Video has fallen back on its on-going series to save the day. The quality of these is only okay – and, as such, unlikely to attract new viewers to the pleasures of anime.

THE STAND

Distributor: **Terror Vision** (Warner Brothers)
Director: **Mick Garris**
Starring: **Gary Sinese, Molly Ringwald, Rob Lowe**
Cert: **15**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **345 mins**
Price: **£14.99** (double-video pack)

Text: **Matt Bielby**

Stephen King adaptations have been getting a bit of a kicking in SFX lately – *Needful Things* got a savaging last month, and this month Andy Stout isn't too impressed with *Tommyknockers* (see page 82) – so it's nice to be able to report that King stories *can* adapt well to the screen, if done right. And here's the evidence: *The Stand*, a triumphant US mini-series which tells King's epic tale of good versus evil after the Apocalypse, now packaged in a good value five-and-three-quarter-hours-for-15-quid video double-pack.

In this case, the Apocalypse is a biological one – the first chunk of the story telling how a deadly "super flu" virus has leaked from a top secret US biological weapons facility and killed off the vast bulk of the population – which only later develops into a good-versus-evil battle of Biblical proportions. In one corner, the forces of niceness, led by the saintly 106 year old mother Abigail (Ruby Dee); in the other, a band of thugs and murderers, led by possible Devil incarnate Randall Flagg (Jamey Sheridan).

It's a powerful story – many rate *The Stand* as King's best book – which is allowed by the mini-series format to sprawl over many hours, and is all the better for it. Not so much a straight horror story – although there are shocks – as an epic fantasy tale, it mixes *Revelations* with TV's *The Survivors* and a *Lord of the Rings*-like quest, and comes packed with symbolism (can the super flu be read as AIDS, for instance?). It's unusually structured for a US mini-series too, unafraid to introduce major characters, then drop them for hours at a time, only for them to reappear later as the story demands.

In other words, *The Stand* is a great story, well told, and well acted – all the principles are good, from the reliable Sinese (now to be seen in *Apollo 13*) to the genuinely scary Sheridan, with star turns from the likes of ex-*Max Headroom* Matt Frewer. Even Molly Ringwald and Rob Lowe, both of whom take major roles, are less punchable than usual. A hit, and at this price highly recommended.

Rian Hughes

The month in VIDEO

SF/FANTASY VIDEOS TO BUY AND RENT, THE LATEST CHART NEWS, PLUS WHAT'S COMING YOUR WAY ON VHS SOON...

13 Cold Blooded Eagles

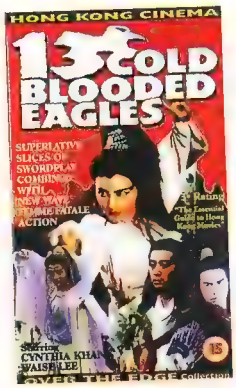
Eastern Heroes Video

Cert: **15**
Director: **Choy Fat**
Starring: **Cynthia Khan, Waise Lee**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **90 mins**
Price: **£13.99**
Text: **MJ Simpson**

A grop of 13 young martial artists roam around battling evil under the watch full eye of they're velnerble "Foster Father." Their on-going quest is to find a book, formerley owned by a bad guy called Shinshu Monster, which explains deadly "star bleed skill." But did Faster Father want to destroy the book, or are his plans far more vicarious?

Theres plenty of honour, betrayal and magical fighting in this 1992 Hong Kong flick. People flie through the air, spin round – and its dead good! However, sometimes the subtitles are so low, you can only see the tiops of the letters, and if they era high enouh to read, the first and last words of ling lones are mising...

But best of all, they've been translated by someone who doesn't speak English, and make about as much sense as this review!


HONG KONG CINEMA
13 COLD BLOODED EAGLES
SUPERLATIVE SLICES OF SWORDPLAY COMBINED WITH NEW WAVE FEMME FATALE ACTION
Starring CYNTHIA KHAN WAISE LEE

Casper The Friendly Ghost

Retro Video

Cert: **U**
Director: **I Sparber/ Seymour Kneitel**
Release date: **Out now**
Running time: **55 mins**
Price: **£7.99**
Text: **MJ Simpson**

Retro Video continues its quest to dig up archival gems that we never thought we'd see again – and this time it's a collection of previously unreleased *Casper* theatrical cartoons.

Three of his first outings are included here – "The Friendly Ghost " ('45), "There's Good Boos Tonight " ('48) and "A-Haunting We Will Go" ('49). All are in good condition, uncut, and show show exactly how Casper changed shape over the years, as well as the beautifully painted backgrounds which characterised early Paramount an mation.

30-odd *Casper* shorts were produced between 1940 and 1950, although "Spooking About Africa" ('57) and "Fright From Wrong" ('56) are included on this tape. The animation clearly deteriorated over the years, leaving these closer to the '60s TV series than the original shorts. Most interesting of all is "Boo Moon" ('54), because a) it was one of only two Paramount cartoons made in 3D (although this is a "flat" print), and b) features King Bombo, a character from the *Gulliver's Travels* feature. Also included are two other 1954 Paramount cartoons, "Crazytown" and "The Seapreme Court."

Casper never had the adult appeal of Bugs Bunny or Donald Duck – most *Casper* cartoons run the same, not particularly funny story over and over again – but kiddies will no doubt enjoy this set. Collectors used to poor quality compilations will certainly find it an interesting acquisition.

Casper
the Friendly ghost
See Casper star in his very first screen adventures!
The Friendly Ghost • A-Haunting We Will Go • Spooking About Africa • There's Good Boos Tonight • Boo Moon
NOW A HIT MOVIE!

Dalekmania

Lumiere

Cert: **Exempt**
Director: **Kevin Davies**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **58 minutes**
Price: **£10.99**
Text: **Dave Golder**

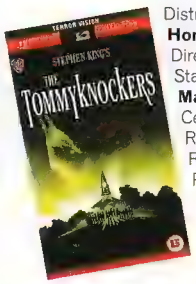
With Lumiere just about to release the two '60s Peter Cushing/Dalek movies in Widescreen for the first time, here comes the timely release of an original documentary about the intergalactic pepperpots' big screen appearances.

Directed by Kevin Davies, *Dalekmania* is very similar in style to his previous *Who*-umentary, *More than 30 Years in the TARDIS*. It's a mix of interviews with the casts and crews of both movies, recreations of key scenes, specially shot drama sequences and other assorted clips from the '60s, including both the original trailers in full.

To be honest, it's all a lot more classy than the films deserve – they were crap at the time, and haven't dated at all well. The main problem is that, apart from Terry Nation, all the interviewees are pretty much grade B material. Now that Peter Cushing, Roy Castle and producer Milton Subotsky are no longer with us, options were understandably limited.

Still, a highly entertaining vid, which superbly recaptures the feeling of that brief period in the '60s when Daleks were treated like a scarier version of Take That...

THE TOMMYKNOCKERS



Distributor: **Warner Home Video**
Director: **John Power**
Starring: **Jimmy Smits, Marg Helgenberger**
Cert: **15**
Release date: **Out now**
Running time: **172 mins**
Price: **£12.99**

Text: **Andy Stout**

The unholy alliance of American TV mini-series and Stephen King adaptations has hit the big time (or should that be prime time?) in the last few years, with *It*, *The Stand* and now *Tommyknockers* getting the tube treatment.

It all started, you remember, with Tobe Hooper's *Salem's Lot* back in 1979, but there's a crucial difference between that and most of the recent crop of King TV fodder – *Salem's Lot* was good, the rest (with the exception of *The Stand* – see our review on the previous page) aren't. The David Soul-starring vampire saga remains a spooky, stylish horror flick (despite the fact you keep expecting Paul Michael Glaiser to appear from behind a gravestone), whereas *The Tommyknockers* isn't spooky, isn't really horror and certainly isn't stylish. In fact, the intro sequence isn't very good at all...

The story unfolds in the traditional King stamping ground of a small town New England community. This time, it's a place called Haven that gets its come-uppance when an authoress Bobby Anderson finds something odd in the local woods. Dogs bark, lights glow, melodramatic music soars in the background, people disappear and mightily odd things start to occur.

Before any of that happens, though, you have to sit through an appalling intro sequence tnat pulls out every cliché in the book introducing the main protagonists. This is pure American schmaltz TV – subtle as a brick, scripted by morons and acted out in such a wooden manner you want to smother the characters with Thomson's Water Seal in case it starts raining.

Saving grace in the thespian stakes, though, is Jimmy *LA Law* Smits, who plays the alcoholic, washed-up poet Jim Gardner. Once Anderson's frenzied digging in the woods reveals a crashlanded alien spaceship, and things really get weird and disturbing, it's down to cynical Gardner to become the hero of the day.

The TV movie never engages the emotions, you never care whether the characters live or die and, apart from a couple of good scenes with Smits, the whole thing falls embarrassingly flat on its face. Despite the 25 year difference, *Village of the Damned* did this kind of thing much better.

BABYLON 5

Distributor: **Beyond Vision (Warner Bros)**
Starring: **Michael O'Hare...**
Price: **£10.99 each**
Cert: **PG**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **84 mins each**
Text: **Dave Golder**

Tape four: **The War Prayer/ The Sky Full of Stars** B-

Tape five: **Deathwalker/Believers** B+

"The scuttles will wilt as the cheesecake burns."

Sorry to be brutal, but the latest quartet of *B5* episodes to be released on video benefit from the fact the only one has been written by series creator JM Straczynski. As the guiding creative voice behind the series, his considerable input is undeniably crucial to the show's success, but as a scriptwriter, he's not good.

That said, "And a Sky Full Of Stars" is one of the man's best efforts, and clearly betrays his love of *The Prisoner*. Sinclair is kidnapped and then interrogated using VR technology by Earth loyalists who want to find out if he betrayed them at the Battle of the Line. Although the plot is lame, it's full of superb imagery, and helped along by taut direction and moody lighting. Sadly, Straczynski's leaden dialogue bogs things down yet again, though.

"The War Prayer" is a more routine, but competent enough, action adventurer with – aargggh – a love interest for Ivanova. Luckily, slush is kept to a minimum as species-ist humans go around *B5* attacking and branding prominent aliens. Decent effects and good characterisation lift the rather humdrum plot.

A great deal less obvious is "Deathwalker," which produces a number of surprises, including the fact that Kosh appears to have a sense of humour. Jha'dur, the last surviving member of a race which terrorised minority alien races throughout the galaxy, arrives on *B5* with a serum which may provide eternal life. Should she go on trial or be allowed to reveal the secret of the serum? Constantly intriguing, with great use of the regular characters, "Deathwalker" also features a superb performance from Sarah Douglas (*Superman 2*'s main villainess) as Jha'dur.

Rounding off the tape is "Believers," an impressive exploration of the morals of religious convictions written by Tribbles creator David Gerrold. When alien parents refuse to let their son undergo life-saving surgery because their beliefs will not allow it, Doctor Franklin takes matters into his own hands. Staying just the right side of sentimentality and refusing to stray into clichéland, "Believers" once again provides meaty cameos for all the regulars as the alien parents petition each of the ambassadors for help to prevent Franklin perform the operation.

But the best thing about both tapes is that they both feature top Kosh wibbling action.

Donald Sutherland performs the Baldrick slug-balancing trick.

Don't Look Now

Terror Vision (Warner Bros)
+ collectors' cards

Cert: **18**
Director: **Nicholas Roeg**
Starring: **Donald Sutherland, Julie Christie, Hilary Mason**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **106 minutes**
Price: **£10.99**
Text: **Dave Golder**

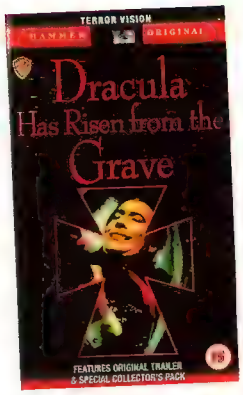
For some reason, when *Don't Look Now* was first released, more people were concerned with whether Donald Sutherland and Julie Christie really nobbed each other while shooting *that* sex scene than with the film itself. A pity, because it's actually one of the finest pieces of cinema ever. When it comes to stretching the cinematic medium to its limits, *Don't Look Now* is up there with *Citizen Kane*.

While it doesn't boast the flashy camerawork of Welles' classic – although some of the editing is amazing – it toys with cinematic convention, and the audience's expectations, masterfully. Few films have ever produced such a densely disturbing atmosphere – the use of recurring images, which may or may not have deep significance, produces an unsettling effect which can make disturbing even the most mundane of occurrences.

Shortly after their daughter drowns while wearing a red anorak, Sutherland and Christie go to Venice, where he has a job renovating a church. There, Christie meets an odd couple of aged sisters, who claim to be in contact with her dead daughter, but Sutherland is sceptical – until he spots a small figure in red scuttling around the Venetian back streets...

Don't Look Now has been made deliberately difficult to categorise. You can look on it as merely a blood-soaked, but conventional, thriller, a supernatural horror film, or even as an SF story about alternative realities. The only thing that it isn't vague about is being resolutely ambiguous, leaving the audience to interpret what the hell's going on.

Self-consciously arty, it infuriates as much as intrigues, but if you get on its wavelength you'll find it an extraordinary film, packed with plenty of powerful images. (It's just a shame the hideous dwarf looks more like a miniature Bella Emberg than anything else.) A-



Dracula Has Risen From the Grave

Terror Vision (Warner Brothers)
+ trailer and collectors' cards

Cert: **15**
Director: **Freddie Francis**
Starring: **Christopher Lee, Rupert Davies, Veronica Carlson**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **88 mins**
Price: **£10.99**
Text: **MJ Simpson**

Hammer Dracula outing number three is a perfectly good vampire movie from a perfectly good director. The problem it faced – and still faces – is that it followed two excellent films in *Dracula* and *Dracula, Prince of Darkness*, both of which were helmed by Hammer *maestro* Terence Fisher.

Although the Count is long-gone, the locals still live in fear of his castle's shadow, so a courageous priest decides to seal his door with a large cross. Unfortunately, a trickle of blood revives Dracula, and much biting of necks ensues. An interesting variation on the virgin-as-victim is Barbara Ewing's flirtatious bar-maid, who is destroyed by the undead Count in favour of the purer Veronica Carlson.

Vampire buffs accepted that, but were outraged that Lee was able to remove a stake from himself because it had been hammered in by an atheist! An above average romp, this has great sets and heaving bosoms aplenty. B-

Excalibur

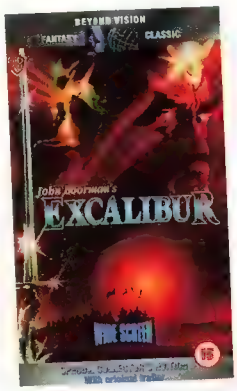
Beyond Vision (Warner Bros)
Widescreen + trailer

Cert: **15**
Director: **John Boorman**
Starring: **Nigel Terry, Nicholas Clay, Helen Mirren**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **135 mins**
Price: **£12.99**
Text: **Matt Bielby**

It's one of those almost films, *Excalibur*, kept well clear of classic status by an only okay script, and some very strange performances.

But despite Nigel "Arthur" Terry's daft Cornish accent and Nicol Williamson's bizarre Merlin, there's still much to enjoy here actor-wise, including Helen Mirren's Morgana, and shortish appearances by everyone from Cherie Lunghi to Patrick Stewart. Great, too, is the look of the thing – all beautiful chromed suits of armour, moody lighting, lovely Irish locations and some great fight sequences.

It's the story – Boorman unsuccessfully attempts to cram the whole Arthurian legend into one film – that really lets the thing down. Characters are only loosely sketched, and you end up caring little about anyone. A movie that should have been stirring and moving therefore ends up vaguely unsatisfying. Worth watching, sure, but not the joy it could've been. B-



It's hard to believe that *Excalibur* came out after *The Holy Grail*...

The month in VIDEO

OUTLAND

Beyond Vision (Warner Bros)
Widescreen + trailer

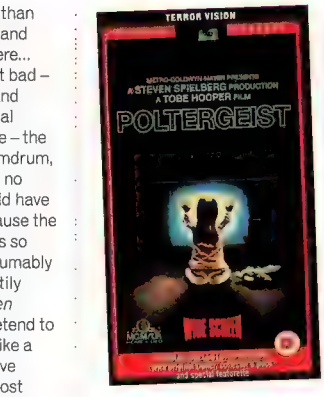
Cert: **15**
Director: **Peter Hyams**
Starring: **Sean Connery, Peter Boyle, James B Sikking**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **105 minutes**
Price: **£12.99**
Text: **Dave Golder**

What Roger Corman's *Battle Beyond The Stars* managed (just about) to pull off with its SF version of *The Magnificent Seven*, *Outland* fails dismally to do with *High Noon*.

Zinnemann's taut Western is transferred to a mining colony on Jupiter's third moon Io, with Connery doing his best to be the Gary Cooper Marshall-type, who stands alone against unbeatable odds, rather than doing the sensible thing and getting the hell outta there...

While never downright bad – the direction is stylish, and Connery turns in his usual dependable performance – the script is disastrously humdrum, full of the kind of clichés no Western since 1945 would have got away with. And because the whole feel of the movie is so drearily mundane – presumably in an attempt to be "grittily realistic" in the post-*Alien* period – it can't even pretend to be a pastiche. It's more like a sub-standard TV detective movie, with one of the most unspectacular climaxes ever.

All this, plus a lot of stock SF paraphernalia of the sort which'll keep the but-you-can't-hear-sound-in-a-vacuum type nit-pickers happy for hours.



POLTERGEIST

Terror Vision (Warner Bros)
Widescreen, trailer + collectors' cards

Cert: **15**
Director: **Tobe Hooper**
Starring: **Heather O'Rourke**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **110 minutes**
Price: **£12.99**
Text: **Jeremy Clarke**

Co-written and co-produced by Spielberg around the same time as *ET: The Extraterrestrial*, *Poltergeist* is pretty much the flipside of the cosy, suburban, middle-American fairytale.

Set on an almost identical housing estate (you'd swear the same extras were cycling past on the same BMX bikes), it eschews gooey soppiness in favour of gooey yuckiness, and dumps obviously manipulative scenes of high emotion in favour of good old tried-and-trusted shock tactics.

When unfriendly pan-dimensional spirits use the family TV to kidnap blonde poppet Carole Anne (the late Helen O'Rourke, who died shortly after completing *Poltergeist 3*), it falls to dad (Craig T Nelson) and mom (JoBeth Williams) to fulfil the Spielbergian imperative of reuniting the family. They're helped by midget medium Zelda Rubinstein, who may be small in stature, but sure is big in irritating voice factor.

Credited director is Tobe *(Texas Chainsaw Massacre)* Hooper, but the Spielbergian touch is all too evident – sentimentality is never absent, and occasionally cloying. That said, there are a few genuinely creepy sequences, some of which bear all the Hooper hallmarks – the best being what happens when Carol Anne's brother watches the leering visage of a clown doll from under his bedclothes.

Production values are generally higher than most horror fare too. And the then state-of-the-art ILM special effects still look pretty effective today – especially in Widescreen. Okay, so the plot isn't up to much, but who cares when you've got a film boasting luminous ectoplasm, a demonic boy-devouring tree, toys flying around in a deadly whirlwind, giant heads popping out of doorways, an extra-dimensional birth canal, a muddy swimming pool full of zombies and an imploding house? I mean, it seems churlish to complain, doesn't it?

***Poltergeist*: Some people really don't like getting out of bed...**

POLTERGEIST 2

Warner Bros (Terror Vision)
Widescreen + collectors' cards

Cert: **15**
Director: **Brian Gibson**
Starring: **Heather O'Rourke, Craig T Nelson, JoBeth Williams**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **91 minutes**
Price: **£12.99**
Text: **Jeremy Clarke**

A second outing for the Freeling family, with a welcome return for the original cast, including Rubinstein's charismatic midget medium. References to the supposed evils of TV, which provided the evil entity's point of entry originally, are reduced – a nice touch being that the family, now at grandma Fitzgerald's house, refuses to have a TV in the house, and the son is constantly whining about it.

Gone too are the parapsychologists, and with them the slight science fictional bent provided by the first film. Once again, though, the strongly depicted family and the ever-enigmatic O'Rourke help carry things along.

Taking its lead from the original premise – disgruntled spirits wreaking their revenge after the desecration of a sacred burial ground – the story now throws in an Indian mystic Sampson, who helps the family against a renewed assault by occult forces, this time led by the evil Reverend Henry Kane (Julian Beck). So effective is Beck as the archetypal evil nasty – every time he visits the Freeling household he's accompanied by sudden downpours – you almost forget he doesn't make an appearance in the first film.

But good though Beck and Kane are, and although the film gains more from the Widescreen format than its predecessor, *Poltergeist 2* ultimately adds little to the initial premise. Nelson's vomit is clearly stamped with horror artist supremo HR Giger's sensibilities when it grows into an animatronic tree, but such thrills aren't enough to inject much vigour into what's essentially *Poltergeist* all over again.

***Poltergeist 2* suffers from the law of diminishing sequels.**

REPLIKATOR

High Fliers

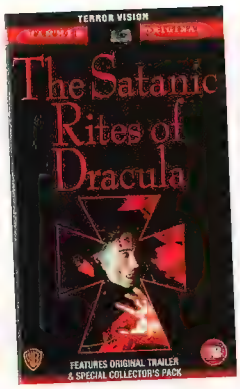
Cert: **18**
Director: **G Philip Jackson**
Starring: **Michael St Gerard, Brigitte Bako, Ned Beatty**
Release: **Out now** (rental)
Running time: **96 mins**
Text: **Steve Holland**

Forced to be low key by a low budget, *Replikator* actually benefits from not having the money to pump into huge explosions and over-the-top special effects, concentrating instead on a story of matter replication and transmission.

Two corporations battle to be the first to replicate human tissue; one team is led by Kathy (Brigitte Bako), the other by Ludo (Michael St Gerard), two ex-lovers and cyberspace jockeys who were the first to make the much sought after breakthrough by adding a fourth dimension to, er, virtual reality technology.

Okay, so the concept is crap – and the actual matter transference process is done via the time-honoured cabinet (*de rigeur* in all scientific laboratories, and, more importantly, cheap too) or something that looks like a CAT scanner, depending on the team – but as the two lock horns, some *genuine* tension is actually generated.

Ludo has sensibly used the technology to forge things in the past, but now finds himself on the receiving end of a takeover bid when two cops assassinate his employers, leaving the ex-con to carry the can and accidentally "replikate" himself. There are a few "good Kirk/bad Kirk" (remember that?) encounters, a strip-tease by no-talent porn star La Ciccolina, and a wince-inducing happy ending, but despite that, *Replikator* delivers something a lot more interesting than the rather tatty box cover would have you believe: "Cloned to kill" could have the advertising standards people swooping on video shops up and down the country. Great Friday night vid fare...



The Satanic Rites of Dracula

Terror Vision (Warner Bros)
Collectors' cards + trailer

Cert: **18**
Director: **Alan Gibson**
Starring: **Christopher Lee, Peter Cushing**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **84 mins**
Price: **£10.99**
Text: **MJ Simpson**

Christopher Lee's swan song as Dracula, this was the second Hammer offering to update the Count to the present day (i.e. early 1973). But while *Dracula AD1972* was an awful attempt to cash in on a London which swung "like a pendulum do," *The Satanic Rites of Dracula* far more successfully explores the black magic themes which burgeoned in horror cinema in the middle of the decade.

So although it has Lee – and Peter Cushing as a descendent of Van Helsing – it's more a precursor of Hammer's two Denis Wheatley adaptations (*The Devil Rides Out, To The Devil ... A Daughter)* than a finale to the series which began with *Dracula* in 1958.

There's even an SF element thrown in, with Dracula and his cohorts planning to release a new strain of Black Death across the globe. Alan Gibson's realistic direction is well-suited to this occult thriller, which is more *Sweeney* than Stoker in its settings and characters. Purists may prefer Fisher's gothic Victorianisms, but others will relish Gibson's novel take on the character.

B+

Scanner Cop 2: Volkin's Revenge

First Independent

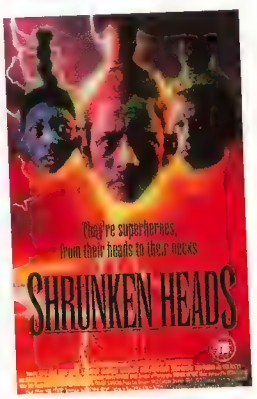
Cert: **18**
Director: **Steve Barnett**
Starring: **Daniel Quinn**
Release: **Out now** (rental)
Running time: **90 mins**
Text: **Steve Holland**

Where David Cronenberg's original *Scanners* had a single focus and was able to generate plenty of shocks along the way, *Scanner Cop 2* starts off at a huge disadvantage – we've seen it all before. However good the make-up, however good the effects, we know that, eventually, heads are gonna blow with monotonous splattering regularity.

Sam Staziak (Quinn) is the likeable, tousle-haired hero – one of the few scanners who doesn't need to take phemerol to stay sane. He's also the cop who put Karl Volkin (Kilpatrick) away. Now Karl's escaped, he's mad and wants revenge.

The problem is, instead of saving scanning for high spots in the movie, it's used so often events get rather tedious, from turning off bombs to opening doors (and probably peeling grapes). And scanners can now transmit over headsets and telephones – in other words, every opportunity is taken to melt heads. Volkin also has the vampiric ability to suck the lifeforce out of his victims to make himself stronger. Worse, the film bludgeons you with a maddening synthesiser noise, coupled with three drops of blood, to ensure you know when someone's being scanned. Still, at least it never lets up, and has enough action to drag you to the edge of your sofa for an hour and a half.

C+



Shrunken Heads

Entertainment In Video

Cert: **18**
Director: **Richard "Danny's brother" Elfman**
Starring: **Aeryk Egan, Meg Foster, Julius Harris**
Release: **29 August** (rental)
Running time: **83 mins**
Text: **MJ Simpson**

Three teenagers are bullied by a bunch of older kids. Vinnie, leader of the bullies, falls in with Mob boss "Big Mo" (played, inexplicably, by a cross-dressing Meg Foster), who immediately orders the killing of the trouble-makers.

But kindly newsvendor Mr Sumatra (Julius Harris from

Live and Let Die), a former member of the Haitian secret police, the Tonton Macout, removes the heads from the murdered boys' corpses, shrinks and reanimates them, and then trains the bodiless ones to use their magical powers to attack wrong-doers.

Meanwhile, Vinnie's gang members are transformed into law-abiding zombies, and lead "head" Tommy's girlfriend soon adjusts to her beloved's new appearance. Mr Sumatra's spells only work because she is a virgin – and with her boyfriend absent below the neck, she's probably going to stay that way!

The problem is, who on earth is this movie aimed at? The protagonists are all aged between 14-15, and I can't imagine anyone older than that wanting to sit through this. There's no nudity, gore or drugs, and very little swearing, so why the 18 certificate? Very odd indeed.

D+

Soylent Green

Beyond Vision (Warner Bros)
Widescreen, trailer + collectors' cards

Cert: **15**
Director: **Richard Fleischer**
Starring: **Charlton Heston, Leigh Taylor-Young, Edward G Robinson**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **93 mins**
Price: **£14.99**
Text: **MJ Simpson**

There's a peculiar charm to the SF fare made between *2001* and *Star Wars* – such flicks as *Logan's Run* and *Rollerball* had an intrinsically '70s look about them, based on the so-called "futuristic" designs of buildings and furnishings which epitomised that era. *Soylent Green* belongs to this sub-genre.

In an overcrowded world where fresh food is virtually unheard of, Charlton Heston plays a cop who stumbles on a clue to the origin of Soylent Green, one of the basic foodstuffs available. Robinson, in his last film role, is Heston's partner, a "book" who supplies him with information.

It's all a bit hokey, frankly, but terribly nostalgic, and bears only a passing resemblance to Harry Harrison's *Make Room! Make Room!,* on which it's supposedly based. The book is about over-population, but the film just uses that as a background. (Warning: The trailer stupidly gives the "twist" away!)

C

Doctor Who Frontier in Space

BBC Video

Cert: **PG**
Director: **Paul Bernard**
Starring: **Jon Pertwee, Katy Manning, Roger Delgado**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **144 mins**
Price: **£16.99**
Text: **Dave Golder**

It's good to know that in the 27th century, the South Bank will still be standing, and used as a prison complex and presidential offices (at least, according to *Doctor Who,* anyway). Somebody must have slapped a preservation order at the end of the millennium on its stunning '60s architecture...

Okay, I'm being unfair. Back in the early '70s, London's South Bank was still relatively new, and must have looked like it'd provide a great location for a grand space opera. And indeed, "Frontier in Space" is the nearest '70s *Doctor Who* ever came to being a *Star Wars*-style epic. That's *Star Wars*-style in terms of the scope of the script as opposed to the production values, of course – it's still firmly rooted in the BBC philosophy that SF means tins dangling from wires, shiny costumes and bare sets. Even so, "Frontier" is a superior example of Pertwee *Who.*

In the future, an uneasy truce between two great Empires, Earth and Draconia, looks like disintegrating when it appears ships from both sides have been indulging in raiding trips across the space border. Enter the Doctor and Jo, who soon discover that there's a third party involved, deliberately stirring up trouble. The problem is that no-one on Earth or Draconia will believe them.

The Doctor has little to fear from his next judo competitor.

From here on in, the show's a heady mixture of battles, chases, counterplots, double-crosses and fairly simplistic politics. It's hardly great science fiction – and the plot resorts to some all-too-obvious padding techniques – but impressive aliens, better-than-average design work and top-form performances from Pertwee, Katy Manning and Delgado (who died shortly afterwards) make this a recommended buy for casual, as well as hardcore, *Who* fans. The only problem is it doesn't really have an ending – the story leads straight into "Planet of the Daleks" (currently unavailable on video), and consequently lacks a decent climax.

B+

The month in VIDEO

THE FLINTSTONES

CIC

Cert: **U**
Director: **Chris Columbus**
Starring: **John Goodman, Rick Moranis, Elizabeth Perkins, Kyle** "I should have known better" **MacLachlan**
Running time: **87 minutes** (and that's too long)
Release: **Out now**
Price: **£10.99**
Text: **Dave Golder**

Nothing could have prepared me for the sheer awfulness that is the live action movie of Hanna Barbera's *The Flintstones*. Not having seen it first time around at the cinema, but having read all the reviews, I wasn't expecting much – but it's far, far worse than even I'd imagined.

For the first ten minutes or so, it's okay – at least the impressive Henson creature effects should make this marginally watchable, I thought, no matter how bad the story gets – but I was wrong. The script – which it allegedly took a team of writers large enough to form an American football team to create – is so mindnumbingly banal and disastrously unfunny it completely undermines the game efforts of the design department. Surely even the most undemanding kids are going to get bored with this lifeless nonsense well before the end?

Oh sure, there's humour – mainly revolving around Stone Age puns, broken up by the odd visual gag, not so much lame as in need of amputation. Not that actors like John Goodman, or the sadly miscast Rick Moranis and Rosie O'Donnell (*a large* Betty, I ask you?), bother to put much effort into bringing the lamentable script to life.

And what's the point, anyway? The movie strives so hard to duplicate the cartoon (the famous opening sequence is reproduced frame by frame), you wonder why executive producer Spielberg bothered. Why not just produce an animated feature, you wonder. Or scrap the idea entirely? It's not like the original cartoon was *that* funny in the first place...

"Gee, Fred, d'ya think we got in over our heads on this one?" "Yep, sure do, Barnie, but keep smiling. Maybe the girls can get us out of this one..."

K9 AND COMPANY
A GIRL'S BEST FRIEND

BBC Video

Cert: **U**
Director: **John Black**
Starring: **Elisabeth Sladen, John Leeson, Ian Seers**
Release: **Out now**
Running time: **50 mins**
Price: **£9.99**
Text: **Dave Golder**

Made for Christmas 1981, this – the one and only spin-off from *Doctor Who* – was made during a period when the show was in great form. At the time, it seemed like a charming reunion for one-time companions Sarah-Jane Smith and K9, but in a modern mystery format. How wrong could you be?

Sarah, returning to her aunt's house in Britain, takes delivery of a crate containing K9 and soon runs into her nephew Brendan. The three of them then set about investigating what's happened to Sarah's Aunt Lavinia, a quest that seems to involve mysterious goings-on at the local coven.

Unfortunately, it doesn't. Aunt Lavinia is safe. Nothing has happened to her. That alone should alert you to the fact that the strange gaps in the plot (most notably, the lack of suspects) are going to combine to bring you something with the strange awfulness of a Golden Turkey movie. Still, Colin Jeavons' hysteria about "a dog belching fire!" after being attacked by K9 is a gem.

Good points: Ian Sears' Brendan is a spot-on portrayal of a ZX81-owning public schoolboy. Liz Sladen continues to breathe life into the terrible dialogue, even when wearing Spandau Ballet's discarded leisurewear. And K9, despite being on-screen for very little, is, well, quite funny. But thank God the series never got made.

K9 ("I tried my best, mistress!") and Elisabeth Sladen are all set for an adventure that – luckily for us – expired before it ran into a series.

ALSO RELEASED

BUDGET RELEASES, ON-GOING SERIES, RE-RELEASES AND BITS 'N' PIECES RATED BY THE SFX TEAM...

Reviews by: Dave Golder (DG), James Dugan (JD), Jeremy Clarke (JC), Hillary Stephen (HS)

Razorback *(Dir: Russell Mulcahy, Terror Vision, £7.99) tries to do for wild boar what Jaws did for sharks and only just avoids making a pig's ear of it. Stylishly directed by the man who later brought us* Highlander, *it bears his hallmark flashy editing and pop-video-inspired camera trickery in embryonic (low budget) form. But the sporadically inventive script, about a mutant Razorback boar terrorising an outback Aussie town, is lacklustre, and often downright dull. And, to be honest, it's hard to take a killer pig seriously anyway.* **(DG)**

Although a flop in the States, **Gremlins 2** *(Dir: Joe Dante, Warner Video, £7.99) is better than the original, and a treat for cult TV and movie fans (Christopher Lee gives a great performance). Coming across like a live-action Warner Bros cartoon, it's a bizarre mix of in-jokes, yucky effects and grotesque homages to countless other films. Lumpy and uneven, sure, but a lot of fun, and the video has superior, specially shot "technical error" section that's much better than its cinematic counterpart.* **(DG)**

Strange Invaders *(Dir: Michael Laughlin, Lumiere, £4.99) stars Nancy Allen in a little-known kerrripes-man-our-neighbours-are-ALIENS!!! movie, much admired for being little-known. A parody of low-quality '50s paranoia pics, it accidentally ends up just as dull, peppering the ponderous in-jokes with surprisingly graphic unpleasantness. And Michael Lerner is in it.* **(JD)**

Three more videos featuring Colin Baker as **The Stranger** *(Dir: Bill Baggs, Carlton Home Entertainment, £12.99 each) get their first proper commercial release. Actually, "Zero Imperative" isn't a* Stranger *story, but it's still a Bill Baggs effort, and with Jon Pertwee and Sylvester McCoy joining in the action, it's well worth an experimental buy if you're unsure whether these vids are your thing. "The Terror Game" and "Breach of the Peace," meanwhile, continue the story of inter-temporal terrorists Saul, Egan and Soloman. These productions are improving all the time, but the low budgets and muffled sound unfortunately limit their appeal to non-*Who *fans.* **(DG)**

First there was Meteor Man. Now we have **Blankman** *(Dir: Mike Binder, Columbia TriStar, rental only). What's with the sudden trend for blaxsploitation superhero spoofs? Mild-mannered electrical shop worker and Heath-Robinson gadget-style inventor Darryl dons red long johns and a cape made from his grandma's curtains to fight crime in a city riddled with corruption. Director Binder plays it for laughs of the dumb variety, but most of the humour falls flat.* Blankman *was always going to be tacky, but it could have been funny as well.* **(JC)**

The Omega Man *(Dir: Boris Sagal, Beyond Vision, £12.99, Widescreen with trailer) is tacky '70s cold war paranoia SF at its worst. Charlton Heston is the last man left on earth after worldwide plague and atomic war. After some stunning panoramas of a deserted American city, the film rapidly descends into unintentional hilarity. He watches Woodstock, gets chased by shade-wearing zombies (led by Anthony Zerbe), then finds romance (Rosalind Cash) and a ready-made family. Based on Richard Matheson's classic novel,* I Am Legend, *it's a load of old tripe, basically.* **(HS)**

In **Dreamscape** *(Dir: Joseph Ruben, Lumiere, £4.99), Dennis Quaid plays a rather hunky guy who can enter other people's dreams at will. Called upon to aid the US President, who is having nightmares, he gets more than he bargains for when he runs into the villain of the piece Christopher Plummer, and dishy doctor Kate Capshaw.* **(HS)**

Coming soon

Delicatessen **28 August**
Cult French movie from the *City Of Lost Children* team. Includes an unseen short film.

Trick or Treat **11 September**
Bizarre 1986 rock 'n' roll demonic possession tale, with neat sfx.

The Mangler **18 September**
Robert England stars alongside a possessed washing machine. Watch out for that second spin!

Dune **25 September**
Much delayed release of David Lynch's sprawling film of Frank Herbert's even more sprawling doorstop novel. Watch out for Patrick Stewart in a small role.

Beyond The Edge Of Darkness: Shadowchaser 3 (Rental) **4 October**
Yes, they've made a third one! Hands up, everyone who's seen the first two. Thought so...

Legend of the Werewolf **9 October**
Peter Cushing stars in a Freddie Francis-directed, John Elder-scripted Tyburn production. Originally written for Hammer as a sequel to *Curse of the Werewolf*, due out soon from Warner Bros.

Darkman: The Return of Durant (Rental) **23 October**
Darkman sequel in which, um, Durant returns. Filmed back-to-back with *Die, Darkman, Die.*

Jurassic Park **23 October**
Retail release of the Spielberg-Crichton epic in Widescreen (and glorious dinosaur-o-rama).

SF Video Charts

On-going Voyagers...

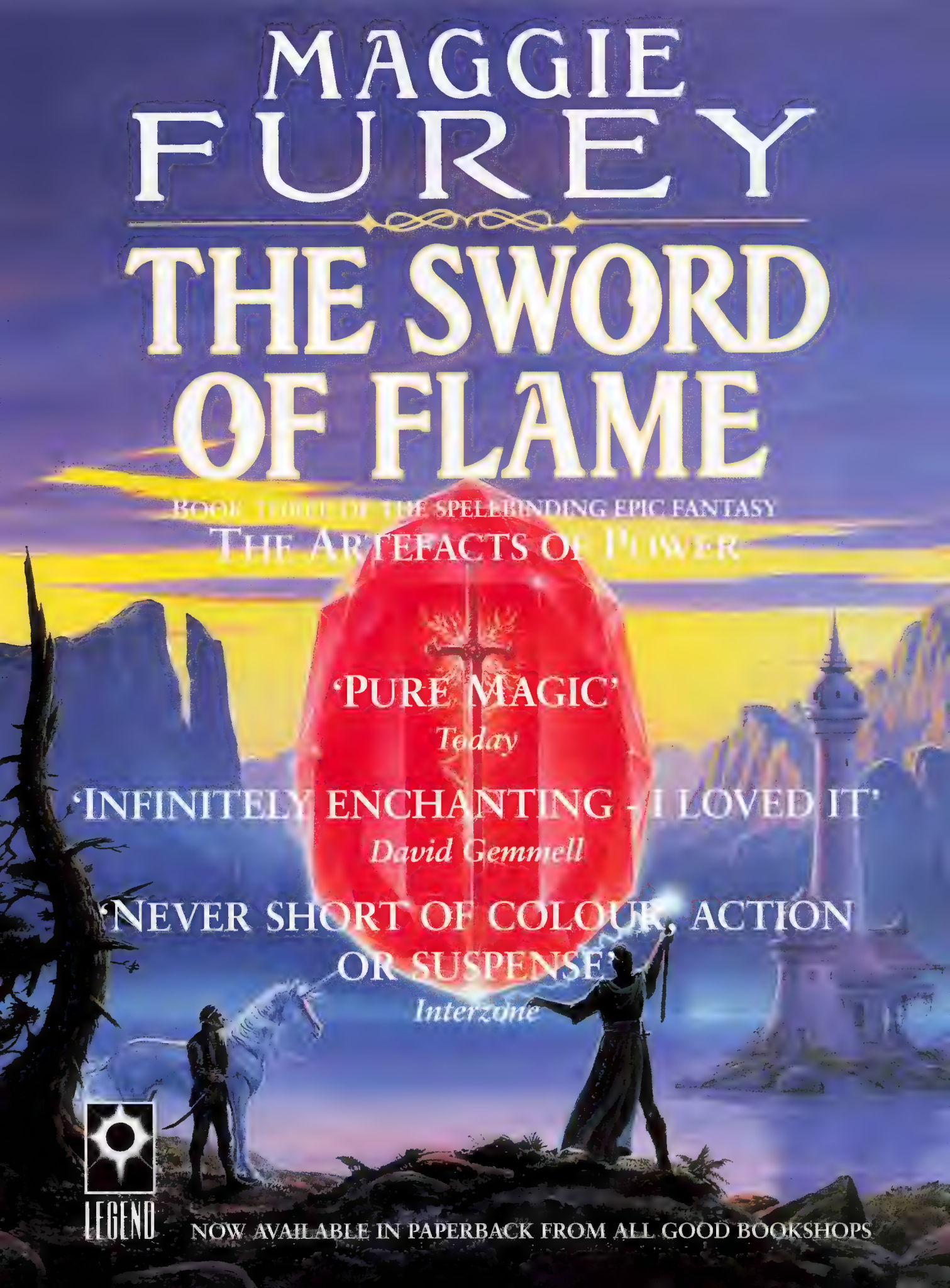
Unsurprisingly, this month's video chart is topped by the latest *Star Trek: Voyager* release. Quite frankly, anybody expecting anything other than *Star Trek: Voyager 1.4* to top next month's chart will, we suspect, be severely disappointed.

Meanwhile, a budget-priced release of John Carpenter's ***The Thing*** makes a deserved leap into the top ten, along with Brandon Lee's swansong ***The Crow.***

And huzzah for that old classic ***Forbidden Planet!*** Warner's Widescreen release of this reworking of *The Tempest*, as part of its Beyond Vision schedule, sits proudly at number 10. Everyone who had the good taste to buy it can give themselves a pat on the back.

HMV SF Top 10

1 (New) **Star Trek: Voyager 1.3** CIC
2 (6) **Babylon 5: Volume 3** Warner
3 (3) **Star Trek: Voyager 1.1** CIC
4 (New) **Dalekmania** Lumiere
5 (New) **The Crow** EVF
6 (10) **Red Dwarf 6: Byte 2** BBC
7 (New) **The Thing** Polygram
8 (New) **Adventures of Kekkou Kamen** Labyrinth
9 (1) **Star Trek: Voyager 1.2** CIC
10 (New) **Forbidden Planet** Warner


MAGGIE FUREY
THE SWORD OF FLAME
BOOK THREE OF THE SPELLBINDING EPIC FANTASY
THE ARTEFACTS OF POWER
'PURE MAGIC'
Today
'INFINITELY ENCHANTING - I LOVED IT'
David Gemmell
'NEVER SHORT OF COLOUR, ACTION OR SUSPENSE'
Interzone
LEGEND
NOW AVAILABLE IN PAPERBACK FROM ALL GOOD BOOKSHOPS

BOOK Reviews

"Because he publishes so rarely, one senses that the appearance of a new Priest novel is a publishing occasion, a moment when each of us, if we're concerned about the future of fiction, should put our money where our mouths are."

THE PRESTIGE

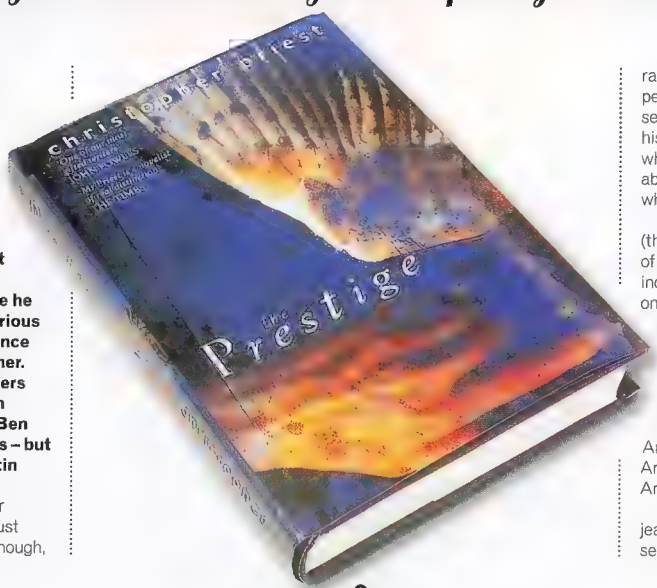
Prestidigitators, magic and narrative games aplenty in Priest's latest, and best

Author: **Christopher Priest**
Publisher: **Touchstone hardback**
Price/page count: **£15.99, 404pp**
ISBN: **0-671-71924-6**

Text: **John Grant**

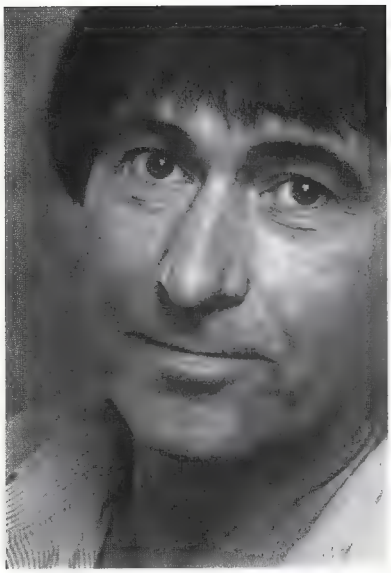
Christopher Priest is probably the most under-rated novelist at work today, and that's almost certainly because he chooses to write in that curious subgenre which is sort of science fiction, sort of fantasy, but not quite either. For some reason, we accept foreign writers who work in this field without batting an eyelid – John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, Ben Okri, Valerie Martin, among many others – but not Brits, unless they happen to be Martin Amis or John Fowles.

Priest, who can write any of these other authors out of their skins with the possible (just possible) exception of Fowles (who, funnily enough, rates Priest very highly), tends to be forgotten. Yet, perhaps because he publishes so infrequently, one senses that the appearance of each new novel of his represents a publishing occasion, a moment when each of us, if we have the slightest concern about the future of fiction, should put our money where our mouths are.



The Prestige is Priest's first novel in five years (the last was *The Quiet Woman* in 1990), and is one of those delicious books in which truth – if there is, indeed, an absolute truth to the tale – is revealed only gradually. A variety of narrators, most unreliable, describe to us a feud that sprang up between two Victorian stage magicians, Alfred Borden and Rupert Angier. Angier made an early living as a fraudulent spiritualist, which is what incurred Borden's obsessive wrath; Borden's public debunking of Angier, prefaced by his unintentionally causing Angier's wife to have a miscarriage, is the source of Angier's venom.

Yet, on top of all this is the professional jealousy between the two. Borden has a trick that seems to require the instantaneous transmission of



Peter J. Stone

THE DIAMOND AGE

Christopher Priest explores the feud between two illusionists – and ends up writing his best novel yet.

a human body from one place to another. Angier cannot understand how this is done and eventually, in desperation, seeks the assistance of the inventor Nikola Tesla. Tesla is able to duplicate the effect only by constructing a *genuine* matter transmitter, powered by the new force, electricity. However, the device is really a matter duplicator – while a live Angier reappears in some startling part of the theatre, dazzling the punters who have come to see the "magician" do his phenomenal trick, there remains, unnoticed in Angier's original place, his corpse, the "prestige." In other words, to perform the trick, he must die every night...

To reveal more would do this novel and its readers a disservice: Priest has many surprises up his sleeve, not the least of which is his own ability to perform so well as a (narrational) illusionist. Never, while reading The Prestige, are we allowed to take anything for granted. Within the turning of a page, this particular magician is likely to show us a new trick that forces us to re-evaluate all that has gone before.

Others have tried this game, of course. William Goldman did it with *Magic* (1976), which was filmed in 1978, with Anthony Hopkins in the lead role (the "magic" involved was ventriloquism). Jack Curtis did it with a rather nasty horror novel called *Conjure Me* (1992). Neither quite brought it off. Priest does. What he also manages to do, covertly, is make sly satirical comment on the nature of human pettiness. Imagine: Here we have a potentially history-changing invention, and what is it used for? A conjuring trick, whose secret must be preserved from the world at large because that, after all, is the sacrosanct ethic of professional stage magicians.

Meanwhile, its inventor, Tesla, is content enough to keep silent about his breakthrough because he needs a few thousand dollars to pay off his creditors, who are less interested in the benefits his work might bring to the human species than in whether or not their bills are paid.

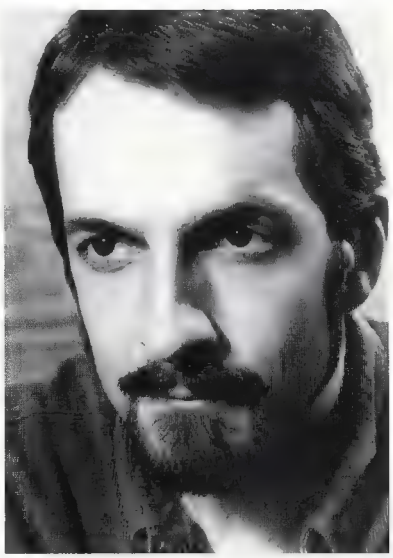
The Prestige is a novel full of subtle nuances. I particularly liked the way in which the dual nature of Borden is handled – is he one person or two, is he a single soul with two bodies, or is he two souls sharing a single body? – and the portrayal of the woman (Olive/Olivia) who, in effect, creates her own twin in order to be the mistress of one illusionist after the other. She, like the illusionists themselves, discovers how to be two people simultaneously. And, like them, ultimately she has to decide which of her selves she'd prefer to be.

I read this novel in one sitting – and it's a long novel at just over 400 pages, so it was a long sitting. But I can't loudly enough exhort you to repeat my feat. Priest is one of our finest novelists, and *The Prestige* shows him at the peak of his powers. Need I say more? A+

Author: **Neal Stephenson**
Publisher: **Viking paperback**
Price/page count: **£9.99, 448pp**
ISBN: **0-670-86414 5**

Text: **Simon Bisson & Mary Branscombe**

Utopias tend to be pretty boring, what with everything being perfect and no-one starving to death. So it's just as well that Neal Stephenson's *The Diamond Age* isn't quite the Utopia you might expect from the nanotech age of plenty, with matter compilers wired into every house, producing anything you want from diamonds to hand grenades small enough to fit under your fingernail.



Doug Wilson

Neal Stephenson looks as if he'll be repeating the success of his previous bestseller, *Snowcrash*.

In a South China slum, a streetwise tearaway steals a book to give to his sister Nell. Not just any book, though – this is the nanotechnological wonder of its day, a copy of the *Young Lady's Illustrated Primer,* combining a multimedia encyclopaedia with Jungian archetypes and Doctor Spock on acid. Nell now has a future – a future written in the patterns of atoms.

The Diamond Age is Neal Stephenson's fifth novel, and quite different from the excellent *Snowcrash.* While the latter was a novel about a world where data is free and life expensive, in the world of *The Diamond Age* molecular machines have made the material immaterial (and vice versa). It's not obviously a sequel to *Snowcrash,* although Stephenson does throw in a few pointers...

In tomorrow's world there are no countries, just groups of like-minded individuals, living and working together according to the ideals of their "phyles," joined only by the Common Economic Protocol that protects your right to earn. Foremost among these phyles is the New Atlantis of the Neo-Victorians, who build a genteel and idealised Victorian world on their artificial islands, complete with bowler hats. The appropriately-named John Hackworth is one of their finest engineers, commissioned to make a unique present for a daughter of the aristocracy whose father is eager for her to have the advantages of interesting times, without having to live through them herself. Realising the power of his invention, Hackworth makes a copy of it, only to lose it in a mugging. Lost in a world of blackmail and crime, he finds himself torn out of his safe and structured society and engaged on a quest for the Alchemist – and his own self.

It's this book that Nell is given, turning her into the willing victim of an experiment in education – living with, and learning through the trials and tribulations of her alter-ego Princess Nell, and her four Imaginary Friends. As Nell grows older, the stories of Princess Nell become more detailed, moving from comforting fairy stories to illustrations of self-defence techniques to an introduction to computer science and artificial intelligence.

With descriptive chapter headings, and three interlinked stories – as well as tales from the *Primer* – this is more like Dickens than your average SF novel. As well as being engaging characters in their own right, the leads are all archetypes too. Nell is the princess in disguise, transcending her plebeian background to mingle with the highest in the land. Hackworth is the Questing Knight, ignorant of what he is looking for. Miranda is a "ractor" (an actress in interactive VR scenarios), searching for the perfect role. As the three stories slowly fit together, we begin to catch glimpses of the grand design, the story at the heart of all these stories.

The complexities of the plot are matched by the eclectic details of the setting. Stephenson is never afraid to mix past and present , and his Leased Territories are populated by Confucian judges and stoic neo-Victorians, all set against the backdrop of a re-run of the Boxer Rebellion. There's plenty of hard science behind the well-crafted prose too. Switch on *Tomorrow's World,* and you'll see all the building blocks of *The Diamond Age:* Genetic algorithms, virtual reality, nanotechnology, lighter-than air buildings. It's not technology for technology's sake, either, and the author's detailed research never gets in the way of the story. But beneath this fine surface detail is a catalogue of allusions, from Ancient Greek history and legends to mediaeval alchemists, via references to Vietnam veterans, blissed-out Californian hackers and oh-so-English Victorian gentlemen. One moment, Stephenson's writing vintage Gibson cyberpunk, the next he's the unholy love child of the Brothers Grimm and a computer science textbook.

Victorians' novels sprawl across generations, following characters as they pass in and out of each others' lives, and *The Diamond Age* combines this sweeping perspective with whimsical yet chilling fairy tales, vicious street fighting and gratuitously powerful cyberpunk technology. It asks the big questions – about nationality, patriotism, parenthood and what you can make of your life – without ever being solemn or tedious, or assuming that technology will fix everything. Violence, adventure, sex, serious hardware and an intriguing plot – it's all here, and it makes an excellent story. A-

Brian Hughes

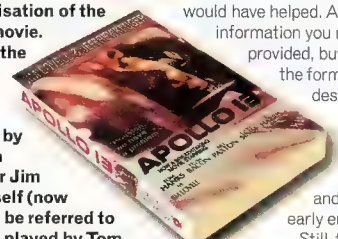
The month in BOOKS

THE LATEST NOVELS REVIEWED, PLUS WHAT'S IN STORE AND THE TOP TEN SELLING SF/FANTASY TITLES.

Apollo 13

Author: **Jim Lovell & Jeffrey Kluger**
Publisher: **Coronet Books paperback**
Price/page count: **£5.99, 378pp**
ISBN: **0-340-63806-0**
Text: **Paul Beardsley**

Despite the way it's been marketed, it's important to emphasise that this book is *not* a novelisation of the *Apollo 13* movie. Rather, it's the movie's source material. Co-written by the mission commander Jim Lovell himself (now destined to be referred to as "the one played by Tom Hanks") *Apollo 13,* the book, alternates, rather arbitrarily, between autobiography and mission account.



And as an autobiography, it's very successful – sometimes amusing, sometimes moving, and often nothing less than thrilling, with some of the best bits not even dealing with the space programme. The clear highlight, however, is the awesome account of Lovell's third space flight, in Apollo 8, the first manned craft ever to orbit another world.

As an account of the mission that nearly ended in disaster, though, the book is less successful. The multiple viewpoints provide insight, but there's a lot of tedious repetition, which is hard going. Admittedly, there are three appendices, but they're all so frustratingly incomplete. Diagrams showing things like intended and actual trajectory would have helped. All the information you need is provided, but only in the form of verbal descriptions in the actual body of the book, and often not early enough.

Still, this is a supremely valuable book, and, despite perpetuating some silly myths about instant vacuum death, provides a vital antidote to the sheer dishonesty of all those dilithium crystal dramas. It's just a shame NASA should best be remembered for its failures. As Lovell's wife remarks: "If landing on the moon wasn't enough of a news story, I don't know why not landing on the moon should be."

B+

The Assassin's Apprentice

Author: **Robin Hobb**
Publisher: **HarperCollins hardback**
Price/page count: **£9.99, 375pp**
ISBN: **0-00-224606-6**
Text: **David Langford**

Hard-bitten readers may recoil from a medieval fantasy world where posh folk are called things like Shrewd, Chivalry and Verity. But there's a certain irony here – the names are supposed to enforce appropriate virtues by sympathetic magic, and aren't wholly effective. The narrator's awkward position in life comes from being the bastard son of Prince Chivalry, sired during one of the latter's rare lapses...

It's a fairly standard feudal scenario, threatened by unpleasant sea-going raiders with a chilling trick of returning their hostages alive and unharmed, yet completely destroyed. Magic exists, seemingly limited to mind-to-mind contact – prized as the Skill when practised among humans, but regarded as abhorrent when done with animals. (A bit like sex, really.)

This sounds routine, but Hobb constructs a convincingly textured society with the help of his solid descriptions, strong characters (women included for once, which makes a pleasant change), an eye for social detail, and plausible court politics. As the king explains, an acknowledged royal bastard is a useful possession: He has the rank for high diplomatic missions, but remains expendable. To make him even more useful in diplomacy, our nameless hero "Fitz" is apprenticed to the court assassin – a fascinating mentor-figure. He's also expected to learn the Skill, but from a sadistic teacher (strangely reminiscent of a Zen master turned rotten) who's coldly determined to prevent him. Naturally enough, plenty of sparks fly.

Two touchy "diplomatic" missions follow, full of surprise twists and reversals. I came to enjoy the narrator's company, and hope the full "Farseer" trilogy lives up to the promise of this first instalment.

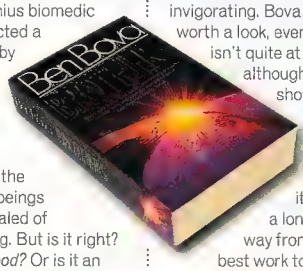
A

Brothers

Author: **Ben Bova**
Publisher: **NEL paperback**
Price/page count: **£5.99, 550pp**
ISBN: **0-450-61335-6**
Text: **Dan Abnett**

A great, thick wedge of a paperback, *Brothers* is a rather dry foray into the unquestionably emotive realms of medical ethics.

Neatly structured around a Congressional hearing into the ground-breaking research at the core of the story, the novel makes us privy to the personal and public wrangling surrounding the work of Arthur Marshak, a genius biomedic who has perfected a process whereby organs can be regenerated *inside* the patient's body. Death and disease are on the ropes, human beings can now be healed of almost anything. But is it right? Is it actually *good?* Or is it an obscenity in the eyes of God and the Church?



I wanted to care, honest I did, and there's no denying the immaculate thoroughness with which Bova presents the pros and cons of his arguments, or the power of the finely wrought soap drama that focuses the debate on a personal level. But Arthur Marshak (didn't he used to front one of the teams on *Call My Bluff?*) is an unsympathetic character who fails to engage, and Bova has a tendency to slip into grave, colourless prose, interspersed with some decidedly by-the-numbers character interaction.

A challenging read, nonetheless, and moderately rewarding, but not particularly invigorating. Bova is always worth a look, even when he isn't quite at his peak, but although *Brothers* shows him at his most professional and competent, it's still a long, long way from his best work to date.

C

Legacy

Author: **Greg Bear**
Publisher: **Legend hardback**
Price/page count: **£15.99, 409pp**
ISBN: **0-09-935051-3**
Text: **Andy Stout**

With *Eon,* Greg Bear created the Way, one of the most magnificent Big Dumb Objects in the history of science fiction. It's a huge cylinder, extending from the scooped-out spaceship-cum-asteroid of Thistledown, tens of kilometres in diameter and infinite (as far as anybody knows) in length, with a stretched singularity running through its centre.

Okay, Larry Niven might have created the most impressive physical object outside of the ludicrous Dyson spheres with *Ringworld,* but Bear has done his purely in physics and maths. The Way is simply a distortion of the time/space continuum, geometry stacks along its path leading to other worlds and different times.

Into this, Bear pitched lots of hard science, political factions, plots and sub-plots, aliens, parallel universes, confused Earthlings, several wars and then strung an entire city on the singularity and threw it billions of kilometres down the Way. *Eon,* in short, was a bit of a masterpiece of hard SF, and if the sequel, *Eternity,* wasn't quite so good, at least it tied up a few of the loose threads.

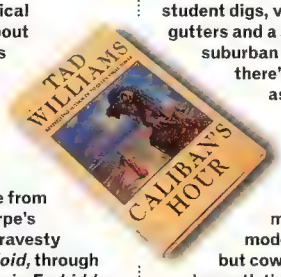
Legacy, however, is set a mere 25 years after the opening of the Way, and a long time indeed before either of the previous two books, but just isn't in the same league. Bear simply uses The Way and Thistledown as background, sending the young Hexamon agent Ser Olmy to Lamarckia to investigate the actions of a group of political dissidents. There Olmy finds internecine struggles blowing up into full scale warfare and a planetary ecosystem under threat from the new colonists. The Way was the focus of the first two books; here it's the ecosystem, with Bear trying to create a Big Dumb Biological Object to rival his infinite corridor. It works too – the odd, evolutionary path taken by Lamarckian biology is explained in loving and convincing detail.

Unfortunately, the human aspects of the novel are less than fascinating. The writing's stilted, the characters are unconvincing and shallow, and, fascinating though the science may be, even a giant like Bear is in need of a decent plot now and again. Very disappointing.

C-

Caliban's Hour

Author: **Tad Williams**
Publisher: **Legend paperback**
Price/page count: **£4.99, 180pp**
ISBN: **0-09-926171-5**
Text: **David Langford**



There's a magical fascination about Shakespeare's *The Tempest* that makes writers itch to tinker with its scenario. Revisionist versions range from Lionel Fanthorpe's appalling SF travesty *Beyond the Void,* through the classic movie *Forbidden Planet,* to WH Auden's poem cycle *The Sea and the Mirror*... And always the Caliban figure emerges as mysteriously important. Even William Shakespeare himself gave this "brute" the most lyrical speech in the play.

Now Tad Williams lets Caliban tell his own story, decades afterwards. Too late now for revenge on Prospero, five years dead; the much-maligned monster opens his heart to an older and sadder Miranda, after which there'll be nothing left but to kill her.

Prospero was driven to the island when expelled from Milan by usurping Antonio. But to Caliban, Prospero himself is the usurper – who stole his home, enslaved him, punished him cripplingly for coming to love Miranda, and set the demonic sadist Ariel to torment him further. Finally, having thoroughly corrupted this former innocent with the complexities of speech, the wizard sailed off into the happy ending and left Caliban alone with no-one to talk to. "I am a monster now," he sadly admits. Once, he wasn't.

This is hardly the newest of ideas, but Williams tells the story well. It's the tragic souring of a primitive Eden. Also, there's a twist ending, heavily foreshadowed, but which works all the same. It's just a shame the author's illustrations make Caliban look rather too much like Mowgli for complete conviction.

B+

Dead of Light

Author: **Chaz Brenchley**
Publisher: **Hodder and Stoughton hardback**
Price/page count: **£9.99, 330pp**
ISBN: **0-340-62807-3**
Text: **Karen Levell**

Billed as a horror, but bending more to the devices and practices of a murder mystery, Chaz Brenchley's *Dead of Light* is an unusual novel of dark forces, student digs, vomit-strewn gutters and a sinister, suburban Mafia. Sure, there's the usual assortment of skin-bubbling, flesh-melting deaths that mark any modern horror, but cowering beneath the atrocities is a whodunnit too shy to announce itself.

Set in an unnamed Scottish border town, the tale focuses on the socially awkward Benedict Macallan, as he fights to escape the control of a family he despises, only to discover someone else feels far worse about them than he does. As the family members are bumped off one by one, with a viciousness that until now has solely been the preserve of the Macallan clan, Benedict must embark on a journey of self-revelation to discover the heritage of his own bad blood, and the identity of the seemingly all-powerful killer.

Written entirely in the first-person, the novel thrusts you into the confused mind of its repressed and self-loathing hero as he evolves from misunderstood student to sympathetic demon. Brenchley's expert and subtle handling of rhythmic phrasing gives the story as much drive as the creeping revelations that stir at the edge of the main character's consciousness, echoing a sense of the spellbound magic that is ultimately at the story's centre. This is art without the bullshit.

B+

Mind of the Empire

Author: **Warren James Palmer**
Publisher: **Ripping paperback**
Price/page count: **£4.99, 423pp**
ISBN: **1-899884-00-9**
Text: **Paul Beardsley**

In the year 2025, an Earth finally at peace is invaded by the Dyason, a race of asteroid-lobbing Nazis from outer space. Humanity is crushed and demoralised by these not-at-all-alien aliens, and only a few brave men and women offer any kind of resistance. One such person is Squadron Leader Jenson, who organises this resistance into a force to be reckoned with.

The other main goodie is Moss, a loner and survivor from the London ghettos. He has emerging psychic talents (which usually emerge at the most convenient moments), and, as a result, the resistance want him – he just might make a difference to their cause. But then the Dyason Security Leader Gulag need him too.

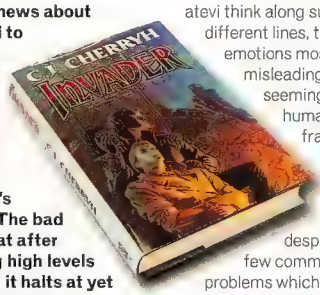
Minds of the Empire is self-published, and it shows. The author builds himself a gallows in his self-indulgent introduction and blurb, a mixture of vitriol (presumably directed against those "real" publishers who turned the book down) and apology. "It ain't Shakespeare," we're told, but it ain't even EE "Doc" Smith. The writing in *Minds* is bad; even the punctuation is woeful, and howlers such as "were," "whole" and "accept" for "we're," "hole" and "except" are prevalent. The plot is a pastiche of *Rambo, V, Star Wars,* and the legend of King Arthur. As for characterisation, neat ideas and credible science, forget it.

To be fair (or charitable), *Minds* is quite exciting, and even evocative in places. But the most fun I had was counting the occurrences of the line, "A neat hole appeared in his forehead." There are other examples of such deathless prose... Suffice to say, I won't be looking out for the sequel.

D

Invader

Author: **CJ Cherryh**
Publisher: **Legend hardback**
Price/page count: **£15.99, 422pp**
ISBN: **0-09-944411-9**
Text: **David Langford**



The good news about this sequel to Cherryh's SF thriller *Foreigner* is that it's strong stuff, and well up to the former's standard. The bad news is that after generating high levels of tension, it halts at yet another cliff-hanger...

Cherryh writes grown-up SF about complicated situations. *Invader* sucks you into such devious vortices of diplomatic turmoil that occasional nods to the action-adventure genre (gunfire, kidnapping) register as mere distractions.

It's a multi-sided game on a remote alien world. The native atevi think along subtly different lines, their emotions most misleading when seemingly most human-like. A fragile human colony has managed to cope for 178 years, despite a few communication problems which once led to war: The resulting treaty keeps the colony isolated from the atevi except for one diplomat-interpreter, currently our hero Bren Cameron. Now the lost starship which planted the colony has returned, and could smash the precarious truce by its mere presence.

That's the simplified version. Now mix in multiple conflicting factions on the starship, within the colony (currently trying to replace Cameron with a blunderer whose dodgy grasp of atevi language has her saying "pregnant calendar" for "urgent appointment"), and, among the atevi, Cameron learns in casual chat that the Assassins' Guild voted against accepting a contract on him...

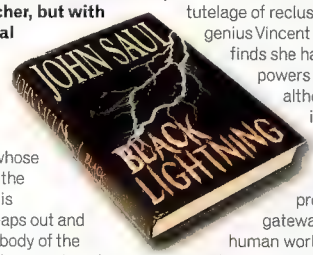
It's dizzying stuff. Even resourceful Cameron may be losing his grip. Let's hope Cherryh puts an end to his and our screaming suspense in book three.

B+

Black Lightning

Author: **John Saul**
Publisher: **Bantam hardback**
Price/page count: **£15.99, 311pp**
ISBN: **0-593-03758-8**
Text: **Mark Morris**

John Saul has been churning out million-selling horror novels in the US for the past 18 years. Having read his latest, *Black Lightning,* it's hard to see why they're so popular. This is bland, formulaic stuff – the kind of undemanding reading which fills airport newsagent kiosks; a bit like Jeffrey Archer, but with supernatural overtones.



For what it's worth, the plot concerns a serial killer whose life-force, at the moment of his execution, leaps out and inhabits the body of the husband of the reporter who has been hounding him for the past few years. This is all very convenient as the husband, at the exact moment the killer is being fried, has a heart attack and, in the course of his ensuing out-of-body experience, leaves his body empty for habitation.

What follows is standard stalk 'n' slash stuff, with the killer and the husband fighting for supremacy of the body. The action plods to a silly ending and a ludicrous final line. The characters are likeable enough, and Saul's writing style is competent, but basically this is muzak in text form.

D

Memory and Dream

Author: **Charles de Lint**
Publisher: **Macmillan hardback**
Price/page count: **£14.99, 511pp**
ISBN: **0-333-64298-8**
Text: **Zy Nicholson**

When enigmatic Native American John Kinnikinnik forces his way into Isabelle Copley's life, she isn't quite sure what to make of him. Then again, she has just painted him from her own imagination.

Under the overbearing tutelage of reclusive artistic genius Vincent Rushkin, Izzy finds she has acquired the powers of a "maker," although the term is misleading, since her paintings actually provide a gateway into the human world for ancient entities called numena. Izzy finds herself irresistibly drawn towards Kinnikinnik, who warns her of the danger that the monstrous Rushkin and his talent poses. But with both men prone to explosive acts of violence, choosing to trust either one is potentially deadly.

Unfortunately, as with any novel that contains reflection on the meaning of Art and the creative process, De Lint's attempts often leave you wanting the real thing, rather than prose. This is a fantasy that's not quite as subtle as it would have you believe. One for the bedside table, then.

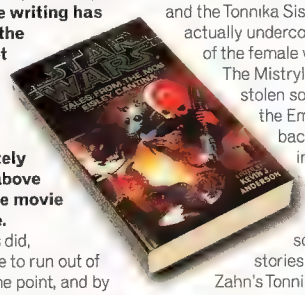
B-

Star Wars: Tales from the Mos Eisley Cantina

Editor: **Kevin J Anderson**
Publisher: **Bantam paperback**
Price/page count: **£4.99, 369pp**
ISBN: **0-553-40971-9**

Text: **Andy Stout**

Bantam's series of *Star Wars* novelisations has so far been surprisingly good. Okay, so in places they've descended into the realms of zap-bang-pow, and maybe not all of the writing has come up to the standard set by Timothy Zahn in the first trilogy, but these have definitely been a cut above your average movie cash-in fare.



The series did, however, have to run out of steam at some point, and by taking the action away from the main characters and focusing it on the bit players, *Tales from the Mos Eisley Cantina* falls from being grand space opera into a run-of-the-mill, sub-standard SF short story collection. Yes, now they're writing about the extras!

If you remember the film, Luke asks for water, Obi-Wan lops off someone's hand with his lightsabre, Solo blasts someone else away and then agrees to take Luke and Obi-Wan off planet. In this book, however, we get to see these same events 16 different times, through 16 different sets of eyes. Some of the tales are pivotal to the *Star Wars* myth; others are mere a-day-in-the-life-of stuff.

Thus you find out that the band risk Jabba the Hutt's wrath to play the wedding of another local crimelord; Wuher the bartender hates droids with a passion, but needs one's help in the search for a new liqueur; and the Tonnika Sisters are actually undercover members of the female warrior force The Mistryl, who have stolen something that the Emperor wants back very badly indeed.

It's a neat enough premise, and some of the stories – like Zahn's Tonnika Sisters contribution – are actually quite good. However, most of them aren't. The simple fact is, the writers haven't been given enough material to work with.

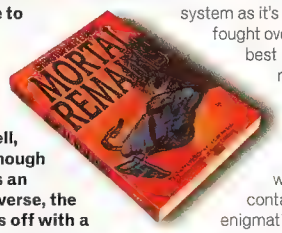
Apparently, Anderson is in the process of editing two more anthologies along these lines. Let's hope they're a bit more consistent...

D+

Mortal Remains

Author: **Christopher Evans**
Publisher: **Gollancz paperback**
Price/page count: **£5.99 (pb), 320pp**
ISBN: **0-575-06083-2 (hb); 0-575-06155-3 (pb)**
Text: **Andy Stout**

Christopher Evans won the 1994 British Science Fiction Prize with his book *Aztec Century*, so it would be reasonable to assume that *Mortal Remains* would be a thumpingly good read. Well, not quite. Although Evans creates an intriguing universe, the plot itself tails off with a whimper towards the end.



Evans' far-future solar system eschews the traditional hi-tech machine society for one based on organic biotech and DNA tinkering. Everything is essentially sentient – tables slink off into a corner to sulk if mistreated, spacecraft are giant animals with cortexes, and a cloak is a simple creature that nuzzles your neck if you're feeling down. Evans has also slipped in a neat variation on the cyberspace chestnut – a matrix called the Noosphere, where ancestors are consulted by humanity in an atmosphere of religious piety.

Into this bizarre universe, Evans drops a mysterious self-contained womb, quite unlike anything anyone's ever seen before, and something that quickly turns out to be very dangerous. It's recovered from a crashed spaceship on Mars, and the first part of the book follows it round the solar system as it's sold, stolen and fought over. This is the best part of the novel, briefly sketching in details about the characters who come into contact with the enigmatic womb, and hinting at conspiracies floating in the background.

After that, the threads of the plot are slowly drawn together and the grand conspiracy is revealed. This is where *Mortal Remains* runs into problems; too many layers of intrigue only serve to make things peculiarly uninvolving. By the time the mystery of the womb is revealed, you're left with an uncomfortable, "Oh, is that it?" feeling.

B-

Sailing Bright Eternity

Author: **Gregory Benford**
Publisher: **Gollancz hardback**
Price/page count: **£16.99, 404pp**
ISBN: **0-575-06097-2**
Text: **Tim Norris**

Challenging. That's about the best way to describe this – and, indeed, any other – Gregory Benford novel. He's the sort of writer who takes no prisoners. On starting his books, I always feel like I've walked into a movie that's been on for half an hour – I never know who anyone is, what they're doing or why on Earth they're doing it. As the story unfolds, though, it usually becomes clear – but it takes a lot of patience.

Of course, the fact that *Sailing Bright Eternity* is the fourth and last book in the Galactic Centre series doesn't help. It's about the struggle between humans and "mechs" (really alien aliens) in the warped space at the centre of the Galaxy where humanity fled following the destruction of the Earth. Nigel Walmsley (a scientist from Earth who has survived thanks to the mysteries of relativity and warped space – or some such thing) is the wizened old hero who re-tells the history of the terrible conflict. But will humanity win through in the end? What do *you* think?

This is serious hard-core science fiction, and not the easiest book in the world to read. But if you fancy tackling a novel that'll actually stretch you a little, and which has something more to say about the universe than the usual crash-bang-wallop mindless action, then it's probably worth checking out. Naturally enough, you'd really be better off reading the others in the series *(Furious Gulf, Tides of Light,* and *Great Sky River)* first.

B+

Beggars in Spain

Author: **Nancy Kress**
Publisher: **ROC (Penguin) paperback**
Price/page count: **£5.99, 438pp**
ISBN: **0451185544**
Text: **Paul Beardsley**

It's the year 2008. A couple consult a doctor about their proposed daughter, Leisha. The parents-to-be (specifically the father-to-be) want her to have a range of genetic enhancements, the most significant of which is the lack of a need for sleep. Apart from the obvious advantages, "Sleepless" children are blessed with greater intelligence, are generally happier, and, we later learn, live longer.

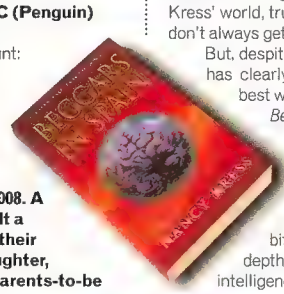
There's a complication, though. As the result of an oversight, the wife is pregnant, not only with Leisha, but also with a less advanced twin, Alice. And whereas Leisha is her father's pride and joy, Alice, quite simply, is not.

This is conveyed with heart-rending economy – what Kress leaves out is as telling as what she leaves in. The emotional power of the opening chapter, for example, is awesome.

The novel, an expansion of the Hugo, and Nebula, award-winning novella of the same name, is in four parts. The first is seen almost entirely from Leisha's perspective, from her early childhood in Chicago (and her first realisation that she's different to her colleagues) to her college years. Along the way, she meets and befriends other Sleepless, and experiences suspicion and persecution from the "Sleepers." Subsequent parts cover a span of decades; the Sleepless become a people in their own right, withdrawing to their Sanctuary in space, where they make further developments to the human race, and invent new prejudices of their own. Against this background, we follow the story of Leisha's relationship with her estranged, ageing twin.

Beggars in Spain is rich and visionary, and everything in it rings true. It also provides one of the few really convincing portrayals of an alien society – an achievement that is in no way diminished just because the "aliens" are actually our own progeny. The only real drawback is that at times it's a little uninvolving – we're shown Kress' world, true enough, but don't always get to live in it.

But, despite this, Kress has clearly created her best work to date. *Beggars in Spain* is perfect if you're looking for something that offers a bit of both depth and intelligence.



A-

The Star Fraction

Author: **Ken MacLeod**
Publisher: **Legend hardback**
Price/page count: **£10, 341pp**
ISBN: **0-09-955871-8**
Text: **David Langford**

An impressive first novel, whose background of a country divided into semi-anarchic, data-raddled and fitfully warring enclaves has two significant differences from the standard cyberpunk future. The country is Britain, and the viewpoint is heavily left-wing...

The intricate setting emerges in tantalising glimpses as sympathetic mercenaries clash in rattles of high-tech gunfire, hackers assault systems that hack right back into them, the dread UN/US Stasis police (Men In Black) try to suppress "deep technology," including the AI seemingly assembling itself in the Net, and the "Black Plan" of Britain's outlawed – but technically legitimate – socialist government churns mysteriously away in its software labyrinths. One outfit's electronic letterhead implies much: "Registered Terrorist Organisation #3254."

To paint such a detailed background, while juggling multiple characters in a taut adventure narrative, is a major SF skill, and MacLeod clearly has it. He's clever, witty, and his future has the right grainy feel to it, with important developments happening in pubs and motorway services as well as laboratories or cyberspace.

Admittedly, I couldn't swallow all the plot devices: UN/US laser satellites capable of frying anything on Earth (where's the budget for them?), a super-software utility that the Internet depends on but whose operation no-one understands (yes, yawn, it contains a Secret), and the entire working population of America supporting UK socialism against US/UN troops (ha bloody ha!).

Still, it's a nifty read, and puts forward a laudable motto: "No More New World Orders."

A-

Knights of the Black Earth

Author: **Margaret Weis & Don Perrin**
Publisher: **Gollancz hardback**
Price/page count: **£15.99, 384pp**

ALSO RELEASED

Assorted paperbacks, re-releases and anthologies hitting the shops this month

*Reviews by: Dave Golder (**DG**), Dave Langford (**DL**), Mike Simpson (**MS**)*

Brother Termite *(Patricia Anthony, NEL, 250pp, £5.99) is the kind of book that'd give Spooky Mulder orgasms. In the mid 21st century, aliens are in the Whitehouse and trying to integrate into US society, thanks to almost a century of secret negotiations with various presidents and the FBI. But they might not as benign and politically ignorant as they seem. Good characterisation and some Rankin-esque touches fail to balance the ridiculously tiresomely convoluted plot of political intrigue.* **(DG)**

The Discworld Companion *by Terry Pratchett and Stephen Briggs (Gollancz, paperback, 288pp, £6.99) is an exhaustive concordance of names, places and fictional facts for all addicts of those* Discworld *books by, er, some guy with a beard. Essential reading for those who find trivia essential, and featuring many familiar jokes, plus a few new ones for luck.* **(DL)**

And still they come – Anne McCaffrey is not so much an author these days as a cottage industry. **The Dolphins of Pern**, *her latest work (Corgi, paperback, 320pp, £4.99), is pretty much more of the same – a competent, undemanding and slightly twee SF fantasy, with unhealthy dollops of nonsense-speak. This time round it's talking dolphins that take centre stage. Time for that patented reviewer's get-out clause – okay if you like this sort of thing.* **(DG)**

The Fallen Moon *(VGSF, paperback, 544pp, £5.99) completes the "Book of Mana" saga which Ian Watson began in* Lucky's Harvest. *It's a huge, baroque, quirky, outrageous and often sexy remake of the Finnish "Kalevala" legend-cycle as science fiction. Great fun.* **(DL)**

William Gibson's influence has raged through sf like a computer virus. His instant-classic "cyberspace trilogy" comprises **Neuromancer**, **Count Zero** *and* **Mona Lisa Overdrive** *(all HarperCollins, paperback, £5.99): Neuromancer has the raw power and won the awards, Zero offers the best scenes with its voodoo, while Overdrive is the best written. Too much? Well, try the neon-lit title story of* **Burning Chrome** *(HarperCollins, paperback, £5.99; includes Johnny Mnemonic and others) instead. That's where it all began, after all.* **(DL)**

Little Deaths, *edited by Ellen Datlow (Millennium, paperback, 454pp, £5.99), is an anthology of 24 erotic horror stories, all but two of which are new. Quality varies, as you'd expect. Some are spooky, but some are neither sexy or horrific. The list of authors is impressive, including Clive Barker (a* Great and Secret Show *spin-off), M John Harrison, KW Jeter, and Richard Christian Matheson. It passes the time, but few of the tales are memorable.* **(MS)**

Stodgy, plodding, and reading like a university thesis, **Millennium** *(NEL, paperback, 595pp, £5.99) is WA Harbinson's fourth and final book in the Projekt Saucer series. A case of I've-done-my-research-and-I'm-going-to-use-it, Millennium tries to be an epic, X Files-style conspiracy theory novel about UFOs, but ends up overlong and uninvolving.* **(DG)**

Kim Stanley Robinson's **Pacific Edge** *(HarperCollins, paperback, 280pp, £4.99) concludes his thematic Orange County trilogy of Californian futures: A post-holocaust life in The Wild Shore, an urban dystopia in The Gold Coast, and now a beautifully presented and fascinatingly flawed Utopia. One of our finest SF authors.* **(DL)**

Another Clarke award shortlistee: **Pasquale's Angel** *by Paul J McAuley (VGSF, paperback, 384pp, £5.99), a murder mystery set in a massively researched alternative Renaissance Italy where da Vinci's famous inventions have caused an early industrial revolution – pollution and all. Clever stuff, although readers of horror legend Edgar Allen Poe may guess fairly early whodunnit.* **(DL)**

Simon Louvish's **What's Up God?** *(Gollancz, hardback, 216pp, £15.99) is an apocalyptic comedy that describes what happens when the Day of Judgement arrives in 1999, and how people cope with the problems it creates, like massive overcrowding! It's very funny and quite gripping but still a little too short; a storyline this big deserves more in-depth coverage.* **(MS)**

The New Trek Programme Guide

Authors: **Paul Cornell, Martin Day and Keith Topping**
Publisher: **Virgin paperback**
Price/page count: **£5.99, 378pp**
ISBN: **0-86369-922-7**
Text: **Nick Peers**

"A light-hearted, detailed and affectionate overview of the modern off-spring of the '60s *Star Trek*" claims the back cover, going not particularly boldly where backcover blurbs have gone before. Well, perhaps, but *The New Trek Programme Guide* is still little more than a poor man's pocket reference book, especially when compared to Larry Nemeck's infinitely superior (and official) *Star Trek: The Next Generation Companion*.

The book encompasses the entire span of *The Next Generation* series and the first two seasons of *Deep Space Nine*, plus there's an appendix detailing the first few episodes of *DS9*'s third season (with a brief overview of the rest) and an introduction to *Voyager*. Each episode is broken down into a list of the guest stars, director and writers, with a brief plot synopsis and then notes on the episode's content.

The notes not only form a short critique, but also come equipped with bucketloads of information. While references to "Riker's conquests" and "Data's jokes" often provide the occasional laugh, it's a sad fact that they also document each and every time the captain does the so-called "Picard Manoeuvre" (you know, when he tugs his shirt). Someone has obviously sat down with a checklist and made cursory notes, before regurgitating them onto paper with only a few (obvious) cross-references to make them worthwhile.

Further disappointments: The book concentrates entirely on the series itself, with no references to behind-the-scenes information, or even recurring guest actors in different roles (unlike Nemeck's tome). And there's no index, so even as a quick reference guide it's deficient. With nothing to distinguish it from any other guide on the market, *The New Trek Programme Guide* is definitely one for completists (or cheapskates) only.

D+

Coming soon

A-Z Of Horror
Kim Newman, BBC **September**
Handy reference work from an acknowledged authority on the genre, published to tie in with the Clive Barker-fronted TV series which was premiered at Fantasm.

Asimov: The Unauthorised Life
Michael White, Millennium **September**
Unsanctioned biography of arguably the most important figure in the history of SF. The books! The conventions! The magazines! The sideburns!

The Garden of Unearthly Delights
Robert Rankin, Doubleday **October**
Rankin departs from his usual rambling style to follow one character through a series of exciting adventures. And, hurrah, it's not Pooly or O'Malley! The story begins when Max Carrion receives the coveted Queen's Award for Industry award.

The Secret of this Book
Brian Aldiss, HarperCollins **October**
"20-odd stories" – Aldiss' 70th book to commemorate his 70th birthday.

The Mammoth Book of Victorian & Edwardian Ghost Stories
Richard Dalby (Editor), Mammoth **October**
Another in Mammoth's series of value-for-money anthologies, and a treat for fans of MR James and co.

The Changes Trilogy
Peter Dickinson, Puffin **November**
Omnibus edition of *The Weathermonger*, *Heartsease* and *The Devil's Children*. Dickinson's tale of mankind rejecting machines was filmed by the Beeb 20 years ago and is the only children's TV series ever to carry a "not suitable for children" warning!

Best-selling SF Books

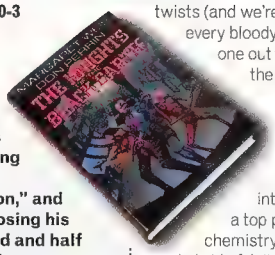
Self-publishing pays off!

Self-publishing pays off! Warren James Palmer couldn't find a publisher for his first novel, so he set up Ripping Books and published it himself, and here it is at number one in the FP top ten! Also doing well are Stephen Baxter's authorised sequel to *The Time Machine* and the latest in Larry Niven's never-ending saga. Those pesky Kzin varmints just won't give up, will they?

The Forbidden Planet SF Book Chart

1. **Minds of the Empire** Warren James Palmer (Ripping)
2. **The Hidden City** David Eddings (Voyager)
3. **Caldé of the Long Sun** Gene Wolfe (NEL)
4. **The Magic Engineer** LE Modesitt Jr (Orbit)
5. **Power Lines** Anne McCaffrey (Bantam)
6. **Star Wars: Assault at Selonia** Roger MacBride Allen (Bantam)
7. **Man-Kzin War No.7** Larry Niven (Baen)
8. **The Lions of Al-Rassan** Guy Gavriel Kay (HarperCollins)
9. **Invader** C.J Cherryh (Legend)
10. **The Time Ships** Stephen Baxter (Voyager)

ISBN: **0-575-06060-3**
Text; **Paul Beardsley**



Having been betrayed by his best friend during a raid on "an interesting moon," and consequently losing his other best friend and half his own body, thus necessitating his transformation into a cyborg, Xris – an agent of the Federal Intelligence Security Agency – has acquired a serious grudge. Now, ten years on, he's built up his own band of mercenaries (called Blake's – er, I mean, Mag Force 7), and information regarding the whereabouts of his understandably somewhat altered former friend.

But there's more at stake than mere revenge, for the fanatical Knights of the title are out to assassinate the King of the Galaxy! It's up to Mag Force 7 to prevent this, but – because of a series of horrendous misunderstandings – everyone, including the entire Space Navy, think – shock! – that they're the bad guys.

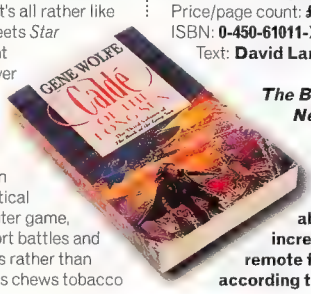
With its token science and no new ideas, it's all rather like *The A-Team* meets *Star Wars* – innocent bystanders never get hurt, and the mercenaries are all good chums. It's even more like a tactical combat computer game, with lots of short battles and character types rather than characters: Xris chews tobacco twists (and we're told about this every bloody time he gets one out too); Tycho's the chameleon-like alien with a quirky translator; Harry scores low in intelligence but is a top pilot; Raoul, the chemistry expert, is a hybrid of Julian Clarey and *Red Dwarf*'s Cat (complete with the latter's overfamiliar jokes, which have now gone a bit stale), and so on. Even worse, what we're told about a character is often at odds with what we're actually shown.

Knights is space opera without a sense of wonder, quite exciting at times, and with humour that sometimes works. The chapter headings – quotes, mostly from Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* – are delightfully over the top. And don't worry that it's part of the "Star of the Guardians" series – it can stand quite happily on its own.

C

Caldé of the Long Sun

Author: **Gene Wolfe**
Publisher: **NEL paperback**
Price/page count: **£5.99, 371pp**
ISBN: **0-450-61011-X**
Text: **David Langford**



***The Book of the New Sun*, Gene Wolfe's exotic tetralogy about an incredibly remote future, is, according to many critics, the finest SF achievement of the '80s. Now here's volume three of the tangential spin-off *The Book of the Long Sun*, about a colossal multi-generational starship launched long before the New Sun's coming.**

A large human and semi-human population lives in various warring towns on the inner surface of a cylindrical micro-world called the Whorl (whose Long Sun runs down its axis). Wolfe has already set a breakneck pace, revealing many of the Whorl's mysteries in just a few action-packed days. His hero, Patera Silk, is a kind of priest who has been touched by a god; since most gods live in an afterlife called Mainframe, there is normally uncertainty about the capital G. But maybe not this time...

Burglary. Vampirism, both physical and psychic. Terrifying robot guards. Strange weapons. A talking bird and flying men. Political upheaval. Secrets beneath lakes and in catacombs. Revolution and multifaceted war. Supposed "Gods" interfering more and more in events. An enemy airship eclipsing the Long Sun, and one dazzling glimpse of another new sun. Silk becoming unwilling Caldé (mayor) of his beloved city... The exciting, crammed action may be almost incidental, because everywhere are hints that the Whorl is reaching its journey's end.

Next and the last, though, is *Exodus from the Long Sun*. The tension is extreme; Wolfe is a mesmerising storyteller who won't let you go. Recommended – but read the books in order or you'll make life hard for yourself!

A-

MODEL Reviews

"For her very first adventure in space, Meloni Peach has chosen to wear skin-tight black leather leggings, heels, chains, tubes, shades and a decidedly suspicious looking laser-blaster..."

WHAT A PEAR!

Blake's 7 and Alien model-maker Martin Bower likes a certain type of woman. And now he's willing to share her – and her worryingly phallic weapon – with you...

Manufacturer: **Strange Light**
Price: **£69.99 (plus £2.99 p&p)**
Contact: **Strange Light Ltd, 7 Pine Street, Haslingden, Rossendale, Lancashire BB4 5ND**

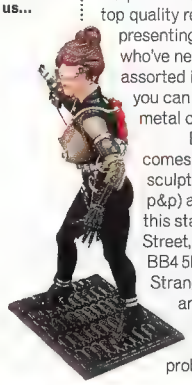
Text: **Mike Reccia**

Take one look at Meloni Peach here – yes, that's what she's called – and you'll almost certainly fall into one of two camps. Either she's sexist-tacky-embarrassing, or she's horny-silly-fun. We'll leave you to decide which group she belongs to. Presumably, only those from the second camp will keep on reading...

According to her creator – well-known film and TV model-maker Martin Bower, who's worked on such high level projects as *Alien*, *Space: 1999* and *Blake's 7* – Meloni is a "space heroine for the '90s," and the first in a series of six original SF-flavoured resin kit figures to be produced by the eerily-named new model company Strange Light, based in Lancashire.

Strange Light's Meloni Peach an ambassador for mankind? Heaven help us...

For her first adventure in space, Meloni has chosen to wear skin-tight black leather leggings, heels, chains, tubes, shades and a decidedly suspicious looking laser-blaster. She's moulded in top quality resin, and easy to assemble – presenting few, if any, problems to modellers who've never tackled resin before – with assorted in-scale lengths of chain provided so you can style the finished kit as you see fit. A metal catwalk-style base is also included.



Each 10" tall kit is numbered, and comes with a certificate signed by the sculptor. Meloni retails at £69.99 (plus £2.99 p&p) and is available – only by mail order at this stage – from Strange Light Ltd, 7 Pine Street, Haslingden, Rossendale, Lancashire, BB4 5ND. Cheques should be made out to Strange Light Limited. The thing is, is she any good? Well, she's certainly well made and sculpted. If she's to your taste I reckon you'll probably find her a definite... B+

SCANNING NOW, CAPTAIN

Manufacturer: **Bandai**
Price: **£14.99**
Contact: **Any good model shop**

Text: **Mike Reccia**

Has there ever been such a useful sci-fi prop as the *Star Trek* tricorder? This handy-dandy scanning device can tell you everything – from where to find priceless dilithium deposits to whether or not that unfortunate red-shirt really is dead, Jim – and we've often thought how useful it would be to have one of our own...

And now we can, thanks to Bandai which has just issued its own version of the classic device, featuring three sampled sounds from the show, plus a light-up viewscreen and display indicators. There's even a carrying strap. The only problem is, we still haven't worked out how to locate any dilithium yet...

BURAN SHUTTLE

Importer: **Magellan**
Price: **£25 (including p&p)**
Contact: **Magellan, 1 Breadcroft Lane, Woodlands Park, Maidenhead, Berks, SL6 3NU**

Text: **Mike Reccia**

Space fact – as opposed to fiction – modellers will be impressed by the latest release from importers Magellan, a 1/144 scale resin kit of the Russian Buran Orbiter, close cousin of the American space shuttle. This "garage" (i.e. small production run) kit is nicely moulded in air-bubble-free resin and comes with a set of colourful decals.

Enquiring space enthusiasts will be pleased to hear that a unique, low-cost collection of pre-cut space fact satellite and telescope models – including the Voyager and Magellan probes – is also available (write to Magellan for more info). Even better, an "Energiya" lifter for the Buran, again in 1/144 scale, is coming out in resin later this year.

The month in TOYS & MODELS

More toy and model releases, plus toys coming soon, edited by **Mike Reccia** of Science Fiction and Fantasy Models magazine.

Recent releases

ABDUCTION ALIEN

Manufacturer: **Strange Light**
Price: **£49.99 (plus £2.50 p&p)**
Contact: **Strange Light Ltd, 7 Pine Street, Haslingden, Rossendale, Lancashire BB4 5ND**

Reflecting the current trend for *The X-Files* and *Outer Limits* scary-vision, it's not unusual for pub conversation – after an intellect-quelling pint or two – to meander cautiously around the subject of alien abductions. After all, countless "victims" worldwide have braved ridicule to swear they've been dragged from their bedrooms, taken up into vast spaceships, examined with strange probes, and then – shaken and stirred – returned to their beds. It's generally accepted what the aliens look like too – big eyed, spindly-limbed, and with ashen or grey skin. Strange Light's Abduction Alien attempts to capture that generic look with a sinister new 12" tall resin kit.

Hyper-smart alien beings decide to test human subjects by inserting probes in every orifice.

The kit builds into a figurine only a mother could love, head tilted to one side, one arm extended as he (she? it?) considers inserting a probe (supplied as a length of transparent plastic) into the nearest available (human) orifice. It comes with a triangular base into which are engraved alien hieroglyphics, and is supplied with a numbered certificate signed by the sculptor – TV and commercial model-maker Darren Longthorne.

Assembly is simple and straightforward. The real skill in bringing this figure to life lies in the painting. Gloss black eyes add to the unearthly look, and careful shading around the rib-cage and musculature on the arms and legs give the Abduction Alien a disturbingly otherworldly body.

Subtle marbling of the base in metallic brushed-on shades ensures the material looks suitably non-terrestrial too.

More aliens – plus further laterally-thought-out subject matter – are planned in the near future, but until then you could do a lot worse than try out this intriguing and unsettling addition to your model collection.

Gawp at Bandai's latest fibre-optic marvel, the illuminated Enterprise B.

ENTERPRISE B

Manufacturer: **Bandai**
Price: **£29.99**
Contact: **Any good toy/model shop**

The Enterprise B starship, as featured in the film *Star Trek: Generations*, is the final offering from Bandai this month. It features three sampled sounds from the movie, plus lights and a display stand.

This item has proved painfully difficult to find in the States, where it was released earlier this year, and will only be available in limited numbers over here. Collectors, take note: If you want one, be quick!

Coming soon

ABC Warrior
Halcyon **Out now**
The stunning *Judge Dredd* movie version of the ABC Warrior Hammerstein is now available in kit form, along with 1:9 scale movie Dredds and Mean Machines. Hammerstein comes in at £39.99.

Boba Fett's Slave One
AMT/ERTI **Out now**
Bounty hunter Boba Fett's orbital sander-shaped ship "Slave One," which first appeared in *The Empire Strikes Back*, has just been re-released in new packaging. The model includes movable fins and a removable panel which gives access to a slab of carbonite featuring a tiny, frozen Han Solo.

Illuminated Star Destroyer
AMT/Certl **Out now**
Now you can light up the Empire's skies with a fibre-optic *Star Wars* Star Destroyer, complete with rather nifty lighting pack and mini-drill, for around £45 (batteries not included).

More gold-tone *Star Wars* ships
AMT/Ertl **Out now**
The gold-tone companion pieces to the *Star Wars* X-Wing snap-fix fighter (reviewed in SFX 2; A–) are now available from all good model shops. These are the B-Wing fighter and TIE fighter from *Return of the Jedi*, retailing at around £14 each.

NEW MEDIA Reviews

"Although you'll need a powerful PC to get the most out of this, there's no getting away from it: *MechWarrior 2* is simply stunning."

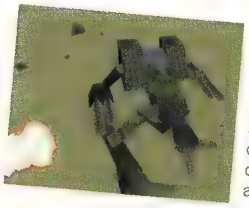
MECHWARRIOR 2

The boardgame was great, but this is better...

Format: **PC CD-ROM**
Price: **£44.99**
Publisher: **Activision ☎ (0181) 742 9400**

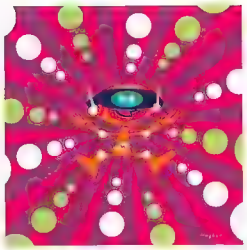
Text: **Andy Butcher**

The latest and greatest of Activision's computer games based on FASA's *BattleTech* boardgame, *MechWarrior 2* is a game of futuristic ground combat that revolves around the concept of the BattleMech – huge robotic walking machines, which vary in weight from 20 to 100 tons, and are armed to the teeth with missiles, machine guns, autocannons, lasers and pointed sticks. As a novice pilot, you must complete a series of increasingly challenging missions for your Clan, gaining rank and honour *en route*. This in turn enables you to issue challenges and increase your standing among your peers.



Some game ideas are just innately appealing, and stomping around futuristic battlefields, blowing the hell out everything in sight, must rank highly among them. Although you'll need a powerful PC to get the most out of this, there's no getting away from it: *MechWarrior 2* is simply stunning. It manages to combine the immediacy of good shoot 'em-up with the depth and subtlety of a flight sim, has stunning graphics, great sound, loads of missions and you can even customise your 'Mech. In short, a classic.

Choose from a range of powerful 'Mechs (or customise your own), then enter the battlefield proper (above).



The month in NEW MEDIA

THE BEST OF THE REST OF THIS MONTH'S SF-RELATED GAME RELEASES...

LORDS OF MIDNIGHT 3: THE CITADEL

Format: **PC CD-ROM**
Price: **£39.99**
Publisher: **Domark**
☎ (0181) 780 2222
Text: **Andy Butcher**

Luxor the Moonprince has been kidnapped by the evil Boroth the Wolfheart, and now it's up to his son, Prince Morkin, to save him. It's taken 11 years for Mike Singleton to get around to the third part of his trilogy, based in the fictional land of Midnight – but it hasn't really been worth the wait.

Although many of his ideas were revolutionary at the time,

A neat idea that hasn't stood the test of time, the *Lords of Midnight* saga is looking old hat.

today they're just run-of-the-mill. Perhaps to try and compensate for this, he's made the thing even bigger than before. But this merely complicates matters further, and makes the game harder to get into. If you're willing to spend a great deal of time getting used to how this vast strategy-cum-role-playing extravaganza actually plays, and then spend even more time working out what to do, there's a huge amount hidden away here. But if you've got other priorities in your life (like eating and sleeping, for example), it's not worth the effort.

NEW! SFX BACK ISSUES

Now you can order those classic early SFX issues you might have missed. Each one comes at £3.50 UK, £4.50 Europe and £5.50 Rest of World (all prices include p&p).

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The original! *Tank Girl, Doctor Who,* The Creature Workshop, Iain M Banks, *Star Trek: Voyager* and *The Six Million Dollar Man!*
Code: SFXB001

SFX2
The second one! *Judge Dredd,* Gerry Anderson, *Proteus,* Jeff Noon, Gillian (no relation) Anderson and *Wonder Woman.*
Code: SFXB002

SFX3
Last ish! *Batman Forever, Congo, Babylon 5,* Harry Harrison, Alien War and Ed Bishop.
Code: SFXB003

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Choose just one video from this classic line-up of films!

Blade Runner: The Director's Cut (Widescreen) 15
The Ridley Scott future-city classic, with great performances, no voice-over, a nicely ambiguous plot and a trio of neat collector's cards. ☐

Forbidden Planet (Widescreen) U
A sci-fi masterpiece, based on *The Tempest*, a massive influence on *Star Trek*, and introducing *that* robot. With original trailer, collector's cards, and utterly, utterly essential. ☐

Batman (Widescreen) 15
The first of the "modern" *Batman* films, featuring a powerhouse performance from Jack Nicholson, brilliant Anton Furst designs, and some cracking dialogue. With original trailer! ☐

Batman Returns (Widescreen) 15
The second *Batman* film, best remembered for Michelle Pfeiffer's glorious Catwoman, and some fairly dubious mechanical penguins. With original cinema trailer. ☐

REMEMBER: YOU CAN ORDER BOTH BACK ISSUES AND SUBS HERE!

UK 14 issues £36 ☐ **Europe 14 issues £63** ☐ **Rest of World 14 issues £92** ☐

UK 12 issues with video for £36 ☐ Order code: (SFX04SL)
Order code: (SFX03S)

And, of course, our group offer from last month (UK only) still stands too:

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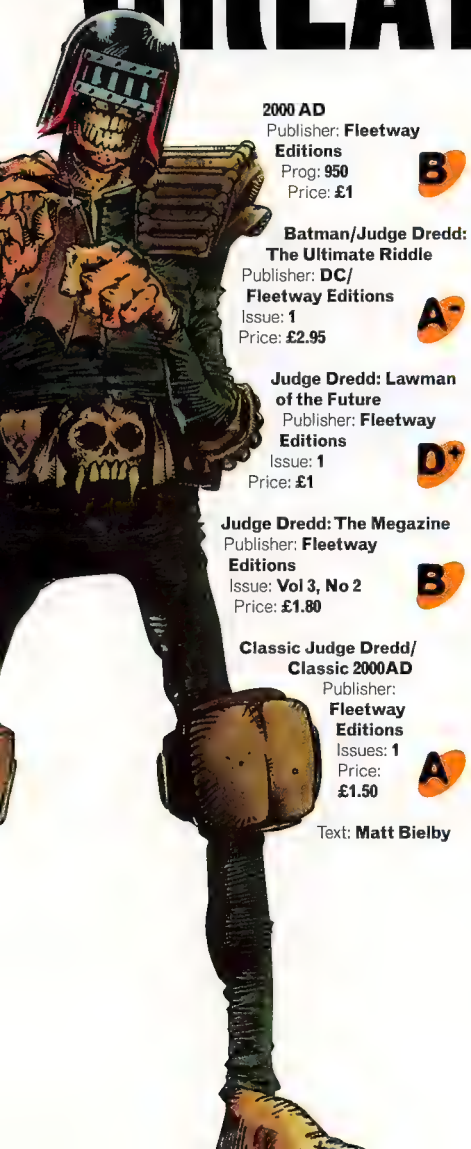
COMIC Reviews

"Even at the comic's lowest ebb, there's something worth reading."

THE GALAXY'S GREATEST COMICS?



2000 AD
Publisher: **Fleetway Editions**
Prog: **950**
Price: **£1**
B

Batman/Judge Dredd: The Ultimate Riddle
Publisher: **DC/ Fleetway Editions**
Issue: **1**
Price: **£2.95**
A-

Judge Dredd: Lawman of the Future
Publisher: **Fleetway Editions**
Issue: **1**
Price: **£1**
D+

Judge Dredd: The Megazine
Publisher: **Fleetway Editions**
Issue: **Vol 3, No 2**
Price: **£1.80**
B

Classic Judge Dredd/ Classic 2000AD
Publisher: **Fleetway Editions**
Issues: **1**
Price: **£1.50**
A

Text: **Matt Bielby**

The illustrious 2000AD line gets a complete overhaul

This month, we turn our attention to the UK comics industry, which, as far as most fans are concerned, essentially means the *2000AD* family of titles. With the release of the *Judge Dredd* movie, the entire *2000AD* line has been completely revamped, many titles restarting their numbering from No 1, so what better time to look at the current state of play?

2000AD itself is, of course, the daddy of them all. 18 or so years old now, it's been a full colour publication for some time, but issue 950 sees a new logo, eight more pages (pushing the count up to 44) and one of the comic's periodic "fresh starts," with all five strips inside beginning from episode one.

The quality of the stories is, as ever, varied, ranging from the great to the terrible. The best is definitely Slaine, Pat Mills' Celtic barbarian and "High King of the tribes of the Earth Goddess," who returns to the comic after too long an absence. This story sends him forward through time to the Norman era, and seems certain to tie the hero in with the Robin Hood legend somehow. Art is by Greg Staples, one of the best of the Simon Bisley copyists, and echoes the look of Bisley's classic tenure on the strip well.

Prog 950 also sees not one, but *two* Judge Dredd strips – the lead story by John Wagner, an averagely funny lightweight affair with decent Bisley-influenced art by recent find Jason Brashill, and "The Return of Rico" by Pat Mills and artist Paul Johnson, expanding on the story from an early issue of *2000AD* that provided the basis for the movie. "The Return of Rico" is the better strip, mainly because Johnson's art is better composed, and more original, but both are readable enough.

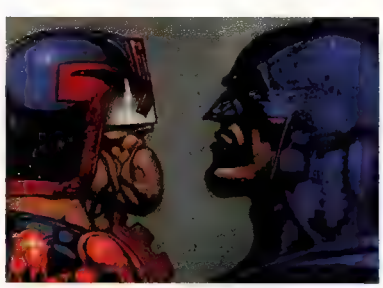
Then there are the two dogs. Rogue Trooper – the blue skinned Genetic Infantryman fighting in a sort of futuristic version of Vietnam – is a perennial *2000AD* favourite, but he's always been a dull

Judge Death (left) towers over *2000AD*, as Bats and Dredd (right) square off.

character, and this latest incarnation is no exception. Art at the moment seems to alternate between the mightily impressive Steve Tappin, and Charlie Allard, fresh from his work on the *Mars Attacks!* comics for US publisher Topps. This prog it's Allard, and perfectly fine his work is too – the problem is the script, which is all shouting and explosions, and has no real point.

Still, it's not as bad as Urban Strike, a near-future helicopter shoot-'em-up strip based on the game by Electronic Arts. Nobody seems to be taking this at all seriously – characters are thin pastiches of Jean-Claude Van Damme, Samuel L Jackson *et al*, and dialogue is along the lines of "We're well and truly plucked!" – with the exception of fine artist Mick Austin, who's completely wasted here. It's not quite as messy as some other poor strips – Harlem Heroes, for instance – but it's close.

Over at ***Judge Dredd: the Megazine*** – *2000AD's* upmarket sister mag – things are a little more consistent. Again there are five stories, but spread over slightly more pages (52), one of the best being the Judge Dredd themed "The Three Amigos," which teams up Dredd with arch enemies Judge Death and Mean Machine Angel. An intriguing start by writer John Wagner, and no doubt he'll have a decent explanation for why the trio suddenly appear to be best buddies too. Trevor



Hairsine's art is a return to Mike MacMahon's classic sketchy style, and a welcome break from all these Bisley-alikes. The other top strip this issue is the Anderson PSI story "Satan," in which the psychic Judge Anderson, goes up against, er, yes, you guessed it... Very likely a classic in the making, with a fine Alan Grant strip and great Arthur Ranson art.

The rest of the mag is decidedly average, Harmony – a "cool babe terrorist against the State" thing – features more of Steve Sampson's annoying "spot the photo reference" art, and the second Judge Dredd strip is okay, but nothing more. Missionary Man – a deadly dull story – is saved by some pretty and unusual SB Davis pictures.

Judge Dredd: Lawman of the Future is the new Dredd comic, aimed at younger readers, and operating a strict "no killing" policy. And perhaps younger readers will like it. There certainly appears to be little here for existing fans – the art is simple and uninteresting, and the stories dull, even John Wagner's.

Batman/Judge Dredd: The Ultimate Riddle is right at the opposite end of the scale, however – an expensive, high-quality co-production with DC Comics, teaming the two companies' most popular characters. It is, in fact, the third Bats/Dredd team-up, and sees the two tough guys kidnapped, along with a bunch of aliens from other dimensions, and forced to fight each other for the amusement of a mysterious alien despot. To say more about the plot would spoil it, but thanks to the great Carl Crichlow art (Dermot Power finishes off the last 15 pages for him, and it doesn't show too badly) and some snappy dialogue, it's a good, fast-paced read. Nice twist too.

The Ultimate Riddle is very good Dredd indeed, but not the best version on sale this month. No, that privilege is shared by two *2000AD* reprint titles – ***Classic 2000AD*** and ***Classic Judge Dredd*** (the old *Complete Judge Dredd* title, now renamed). *Classic 2000AD* jumps around, reprinting classic oldies from *2000AD* and its sister mags as it sees fit. This time round, for the first full colour issue, they've picked on "America," a tragic love story from Dredd's world by John Wagner and Colin MacNeil that originally ran in the first few issues of *Judge Dredd: The Megazine*. It's been called "the best Judge Dredd story ever" – and not without reason.

Almost as good is the lead story from the first issue of *Classic Judge Dredd* – "The Midnight Surfer." This is the tale of the illega Supersurf 7 sky surfer race, and the story that made teenage rebel Chopper a real star. Cam Kennedy's art is perfect, and the Wagner/Grant script is effortlessly readable.

So where does all this leave *2000AD* and company now? Unfortunately, it's hard to see any of the comics ever returning to the form of the first 400 or so issues. There are too many pages to fill each month, and not enough star creators left. But then, even at the comic's lowest ebb, there's always something worth reading, even if you do have to wade through a fair amount of tosh to get to it. *2000AD* remains a great British institution, after all – so here's to issue 1,000 and beyond!

Rebel juve Chopper is one of the few to ever put one over Dredd, and thus deserves the applause.

The month in COMICS

MOORE'S CAPTAIN BRITAIN RE-RELEASED, COMING SOON, PLUS THE FORBIDDEN PLANET CHART.

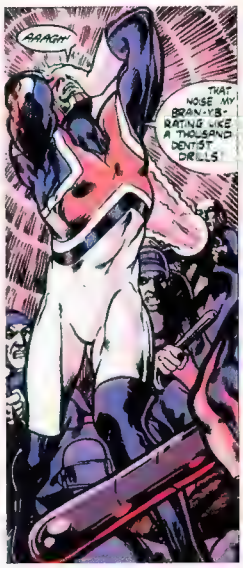
X-MEN ARCHIVES

Marvel

Writers: **David Thorpe, Alan Moore**
Art st. **Alan Davis**
Issues: **1-2**
Price: **£1.85**
Text: **Matt Bielby**

Ignore the "X-Men" title. This is actually something much more exciting – the long-awaited reprint of the early '80s Captain Britain material, originally published in six and eight-page chunks in long-forgotten Marvel UK titles like *Marvel Super Heroes* and *The Daredevils*.

The reason it's exciting, of course, is because it's one of the earliest examples of stuff published by Alans Moore and Davis, and you can visibly see them getting better as the story goes on. This tale of multiple universes, and CB's attempt to save them, turns from a sad, amateurish mess into one of the most gripping stories of all time in only a few short months. Essential stuff, for many years blocked from reprinting by Moore himself, the only problem being that it starts so weakly it might put a lot of people off. As Alan Davis says in the introduction, "Stick with it, it really does get better."



Captain Britain, by Moore and Davis. It gets better, honest!

Coming soon

Tarzan vs Predator at the Earth's Core **August**
Four issue Dark Horse mini-series, by Walt Simonson and Lee Weeks: going by the title it'll be the best comic book ever!

Man-Bat **TBA**
The long-awaited, fully-painted Jamie Delano/John Bolton *Batman* spin-off mini-series is now almost with us. Expectations are high...

Best-selling Comics

X-asperating!

Exasperating, that is, for writers and artists of books which don't have that magic letter in the title. Marvel's mutants dominate this month's chart, but there are some interesting comics slipping in underneath, notably one of the last ever issues of Neil Gaiman's ***Sandman***, the new creative team's ***Hellblazer***, and the Alan Moore-written *Spawn* mini-series, ***Blood Feud***. For many, however, it's the prospect of Supes dissing a few aliens that'll get them going.

The Forbidden Planet Comic Chart

1 **Gen-X** #7 Marvel
2 **Uncanny X-Men** #324 Marvel
3 **X-Factor** #114 Marvel
4 **X-Men** #6 Marvel
5 **Sandman** #71 DC
6 **Superman Vs Aliens** #3 Dark Horse
7 **Spawn: Blood Feud** #2 Image
8 **Spiderman Max Cloneage Alpha** #1 Marvel
9 **Hellblazer** #92 DC
10 **Ruins** #1 Marvel

SFX
The Science Fiction Magazine

#4 **September 1995**

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SFX, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, Avon BA1 2BW (01225) 442244 (01225) 446019 sfx@futurenet.co.uk

Who we are and what we do:

Editor **Matt Bielby** **mattb@futurenet.co.uk**
Deputy Editor **Dave Golder** **sfx@futurenet.co.uk**
Staff Writer **MJ Simpson**
Production Editor **Dan Goodleff**

Art Editor **Lisa Nicholls**

Photography **Brian Aris** **Rick Buetter** **Mike Reccia** **Peter Stone** **Rob Scott** **Craig Stennett**

Space Cadet Illustration **Rian Hughes**

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Future PUBLISHING

This month, the SFX team enjoyed *Babylon 5*, *Judge Dredd* on Radio One, *The Garden of Unearthly Delights* (Robert Rankin) and *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers*.

Did you know...
Classic horror film [illegible] Lugosi was [illegible] Bela Lugosi [illegible] Dracula [illegible] Universal [illegible] Pat Cleveland

TOSH Reviews

"The 30th Anniversary Calendar (aka, the Classic *Trek* Calendar) is far and away the best, mainly because the photos are a) generally less well known and b) of a much better quality."

STAR TREK CALENDARS

Be greeted every month by the crew!

Distributors: **Simon and Schuster**
Available: **29 August**
Price: **£6.99**

30th Anniversary	**A**
Voyager	**C**
The Next Generation	**B**
Deep Space Nine	**B-**

Text: **Dave Golder**

The future is here today... Er, sort of. The 1996 set of official *Star Trek* calendars are already upon us, so if you can't wait to stick them on your Christmas list here's how they're looking...

Each one is stylishly designed, with typography to suit the respective series, printed on high quality glossy paper and packed with photos (one per month, plus others dotted around). The 30th Anniversary Calendar (aka, the Classic *Trek* Calendar, aka, the one with Tubsy and Pointy-Ears) is the best, mainly because the photos are a) less well known and b) of a much better quality.

The other calendars settle for common old TV and movie stills which we've all seen before. The TV stills are fuzzy and dark, so at least the *TNG* calendar benefits from having a movie to draw from. Oh yeah, and there's a bit too much snogging in the *Deep Space Nine* one for my liking.

The month in TOSH

PIGEONS, HOLES AND A BIZARRE MISCELLANY 'NUFF SAID, REALLY!

COMMUNICATING DOORS

What is it? **An SF-flavoured play**
Writer/director: **Alan Ayckbourn**
Starring: **Julia McKenzie, Ken Bones, Adie Allen**
Where? **Newcastle in July; the West End in August**
Text: **MJ Simpson**

Alan Ayckbourn? He's the one that does all those plays about middle-aged couples suffering mid-life crises while on holiday in Swansea, isn't he? So what's he doing writing and producing a play all about time travel?

Hard to say, but that's what he's done in *Communicating Doors.* And in the process he's produced a fast-moving story that'll appeal to both SF fans and your average middle-brow theatre-goer alike. And impressively – the interval aside – he does it through continuous action too, without a single scenery-change as the characters travel through time.

The story opens in the Regal Hotel in the wartorn London of 2014. Old man Reece hires Poopay, a dominatrix prostitute, and makes her witness his dying confession regarding his (comparatively innocent) role in the murder of his two wives. When the actual murderer shows up and blocks the exit, Poopay is forced to flee through the communicating doors. But instead of finding herself in the adjacent suite, she arrives in the same room in 1994, disturbing the sleep of Ruella, the second of Reece's doomed wives. When Ruella tries the doors she ends up in 1974, disturbing the wedding night of a young Reece and his first wife. Eventually, Ruella and Poopay combine their intellects and set about changing history.

See it before someone has the bright idea of adapting it for TV – or be left forever wondering, "How on Earth could they have done *that* on stage?" **A**

WYRD SISTERS

Adapted by: **Vince Foxall**
Directed by: **Claire Grove**
Starring: **Sheila Hancock, Linda Baron, Deborah Berlin**
Broadcast on: **Radio 4 in four 30-minute episodes**
Text: **MJ Simpson**

BBC Radio's second attempt at adapting a Terry Pratchett novel, which recently ran on Radio 4, is a good deal more successful than its first, a universally panned version of *Guards! Guards!* on Radio 5 a couple of years ago.

Wyrd Sisters, the second "Witches" novel, is essentially a spoof on *Macbeth,* and consequently full of Shakespearian dialogue and soliloquies, thus making it eminently suitable for radio.

Like most Pratchett, there is a large cast of characters – not only the central trio of Granny Weatherwax, Nanny Ogg and Magrat Garlick, but also ghosts, kings, strolling players, a fool, Greebo the cat and, of course, DEATH ("played by himself"). Fortunately, all are well cast and acted.

Foxall's script overcomes the usual pitfall of Pratchett adaptations – the removal of Terry's witty and evocative narrative – by turning some of it into dialogue and monologue, and it's a technique that works well in this medium. In actual fact, *Wyrd Sisters* comes across as more like an extended Radio 4 play than a comedy series, although it did put me in mind, strangely enough, of *Hordes of the Things* (can anyone remember that?).

Any good radio adaptation has to remember the story's origins – and Foxall hasn't forgotten that here. This series is as true to the original as it could be, considering the nature of the medium. **B**

Ryan Hughes

STAR WARS WIDEVISION TRADING CARDS

Manufacturer: **Topps**
UK Distributor: **CMA**
Price: **£1.95** (pack of ten)
Chaser card distribution: **1 pack in 11**

Text: **MJ Simpson**

Even if, like me, you consider trading cards to be a bit of a scam – print up a load of cards, call 'em "collectable," and then rake in the dosh – you'll have to admit that this *Star Wars* set, published by Topps, is something special.

Eschewing the normal "credit card" dimensions, these cards are approximately 6.5cm by 12cm in size, and feature small borders top and bottom, thus enabling the images to be printed in their original film aspect ratio. And what images they are too – they've been taken directly from a pristine print of the film and are beautifully clear.

There are 120 cards in all, which combine to tell the complete story of *Star Wars.* On the reverse of each is a small behind-the-scenes shot and a piece of production art. Many of the latter are being printed here for the first time. There are also ten chromium "chaser" cards if you have the money and the time to be into that sort of thing, but from an aesthetic point of view these are a bit tacky.

Thankfully, the "normal" cards are nice enough, and likely to be of interest to both collectors and *Star Wars* fans. (NB: Obtaining cards in the UK can still be trick, so if you have difficulty, try the CMA order hotline on (01497) 847538.) **A**

WIN! WIN! WIN!

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Don't Get 'Em Wet Compo

Gremlins 2: The New Batch **is a complete hoot from start to finish, which may be why the canny folk at Warner Home Video have deemed it a "screen classic." And this month we have five copies of said classic to give away! To win, tell us which wrestler appeared in the theatrical version of *Gremlins 2*, but not the video version.**

Mark your entry Don't Get 'Em Wet Compo.

A G-g-g-g-g-g-ghost! Compo

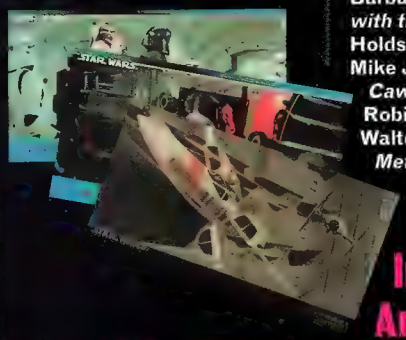
Once you've watched the newest incarnation of *Casper* the friendly ghost on the big screen, sit back and sample his first ever stories on video, courtesy of that cool archive label Retro Video. We have ten copies to give away to the first ten people who can tell us which Monty Python star appears in the *Casper* movie.

Mark your entry A G-g-g-g-g-g-ghost! Compo.

It's On The Cards Compo

Trading cards – they're the hot new collectables and they're taking the UK by storm! We have five complete sets to give away, courtesy of CMA, if you can tell us which director is currently preparing a film based on the legendary *Mars Attacks!* cards. Please specify which set you'd like – *Doctor Who, The X-Files, Judge Dredd* or "Widescreen" *Star Wars.*

Mark your entry It's On The Cards Compo.



Lotsa Literature Compo

Hooray for HarperCollins, who has set up a brilliant new SF and fantasy imprint, succinctly named Voyager. To celebrate the imprint's launch, we have a huge 240 (240!) of its superlative tomes to give away, along with 30 stylish Voyager T-shirts.

To win a T-shirt and eight (!) books of your choice (so 30 lucky people get to win in all), tell us the title of Isaac Asimov's first published SF story. Please remember to include the titles of the eight books you would like from the following list: Isaac Asimov, *Gold;* Stephen Baxter, *The Time Ships;* David Bischoff, *Space Precinct Vol 1;* David Bischoff, *Space Precinct Vol 2;* Terry Bisson, *Johnny Mnemonic* (novelisation); Marion Zimmer Bradley, *Lady of the Trillium;* Poppy Z Brite (ed), *Love In Vein;* Pat Cadigan, *Parasite;* Philip K Dick, *A Scanner Darkly;* William Gibson, *Johnny Mnemonic* (story & script); Charles Grant, *The X-Files: Goblins;* Charles Grant, *The X-Files: Whirlwind;* Barbara Hambly, *Travelling with the Dead;* Robert Holdstock, *The Emerald Forest;* Mike Jefferies, *The Knights of Cawdor;* Kim Stanley Robinson, *Pacific Edge;* Walter Jon Williams, *Metropolitan.*

Mark your entry Lotsa Literature Compo.

Inscrutable Animation Compo

As interest in Japanese anime grows, Pioneer Anime releases the first volumes of four sagas, namely *Kishin Heidan, Green Legend Ran, Moldiver* and *Tenchi Muyo.* We have five sets of these four videos to give away, along with *Kishin Heidan* baseball caps. To win, just tell us the name of the female demon released by Tenchi in *Tenchi Muyo.*

Mark your entry Inscrutable Animation Compo.

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Mark your entry Five Metres! That's In The Room! Compo.

Send all your competition entries to:

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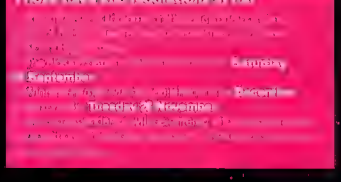
SFX2 WINNERS

Due to the constraints of deadlines, winners' names will now appear three issues down the line. That means we'll be running the winners from SFX2 next month, and the winners of the competitions on this page will be announced in SFX7 (on sale Tuesday 28 November).



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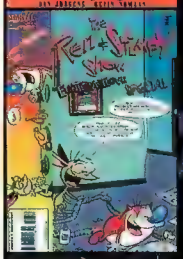

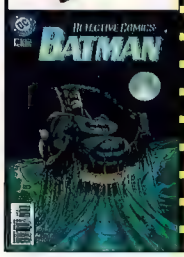

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FANTASM '95

THE NATIONAL FILM THEATRE, LONDON, 14-16 JULY 1995

NOW IN ITS SECOND YEAR, FANTASM FIRMLY ESTABLISHES ITSELF AS THE COUNTRY'S LEADING HORROR FILM FESTIVAL – DESPITE, WRITES **DAVE GOLDER**, SHOWING SOME VERY DISAPPOINTING FILMS..

Candyman 2 was just one of the many UK premières that took place at Fantasm '95...

...but organiser Nigel Floyd reckoned it was one of the worst sequels ever!

Fantasm '95 is the UK's premier horror film festival, at which no less than eight movies received their first public UK showing, and Clive Barker's *Lord of Illusions* had its world première.

There was a distinct Barker theme to the event, in fact, with *Candyman 2: Farewell to the Flesh* premièring, showings of a couple of the man's early directorial efforts (see page 79), and an interview with the guy responsible for the fx on many of Barker's works, Bob Keen.

Fittingly, it was Barker's latest horror opus, *Lord of Illusion,* that kicked off the festival on Friday night. Sadly, it was a disappointment. There were plenty of classic moments of weirdly Barkeresque gore, but the plot – a watered-down *Angel Heart* – amounted to little.

Strangely, *Candyman 2,* which rounded off Fantasm on the Sunday, was much more fun, albeit a lot less ambitious, and hampered by a predictable plot. Saturday's headliner, meanwhile, was the big budget *Hideaway,* which proved to be terrible.

Starring Jeff Goldblum, it's an adaptation of a Dean R Koontz novel, with some of the most misguided computer animation effects ever. There's one final twist, however, which comes *after* the final credits, and is more entertaining than the rest of the movie put together.

The real gems of Fantasm were to be found scattered earlier in the schedules. *The Dead Mother* was a stylish Spanish thriller, while *The Upstairs Neighbour* was a superbly nervy, low budget ($100,000) US paranoia trip with a witty script that only fell apart at the end.

Sunday afternoon was given over to a celebration of the work of lighting cameraman and director Freddie Francis. As a director, he was responsible for many classic '60s horror flicks from Hammer and Amicus, while his camerawork has given an extra sheen to classics like *The Elephant Man* and *Cape Fear.*

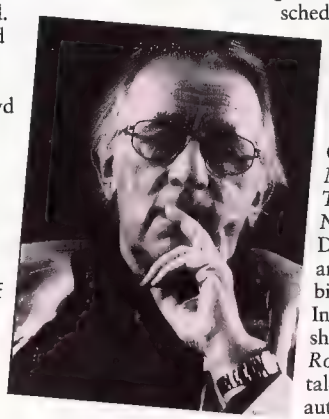
"*Hideaway* boasted some of the most woefully misguided computer animation effects ever."

Things kicked off with a showing of the 1961 movie *The Innocents,* starring Deborah Kerr as a Victorian governess who is convinced that the children in her care are possessed. This was followed by an interview with Francis himself. The crowd lapped up his anecdotes, particularly the one about getting Martin Scorsese to use a model instead of a real boat at the end of *Cape Fear* (yes, he's to blame).

But the real highlight of the weekend was the Bob Keen interview. Flanked by a Pinhead mask and a model of the monster from *Proteus,* he revealed, among other things, that the one effect he would still like to achieve would be to show a man turning himself inside out.

He also revealed that the scene in *Candyman* where the bees come out of Candy's mouth was done for real – Keen did his research and discovered that bees less than a week old can't sting or fly. The only problem he had was convincing the actor to wear a "mouth condom" into which he had to deposit 200 bees...

Filling in the gaps in the schedules were *Wes Craven Presents Mindripper* and *The Last Gasp; Nightwatch,* a Danish thriller; and a couple of bizarre British Film Institute funded shorts, including *Rose Red,* a surreal tale written by SF author Simon Ings.



Freddie Francis, cinematographer and director, was the event's guest of honour.

Attendance was up on last year's Fantasm, so at least the future of the event is secure. Plans for Fantasm '96 are already underway, including a retrospective on the work of cult Italian gore director Dario Argento, plus a first showing of his latest work. Let's hope he proves more reliable than the erratic Barker...

FANTASTIC DAYS

Dates for your diary

Here's the latest list of upcoming convention dates. All events listed are non-profit-making affairs organised by fans, unless otherwise stated. Price quoted is full weekend registration at time of going to press, but may rise nearer the con. One or two-day registrations may be available. Always enclose an SAE with enquiries. Con organisers, if your con is not here or your listing is wrong or incomplete, send details to Live!, SFX, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, Avon BA1 2BW.

24-28 August 1995
Intersection
53rd World SF Convention at SECC, Glasgow. Postal registrations are now closed. On-door registrations range from £20 (Thur or Mon) to £100 (all five days).

1-3 September 1995
Lightspeed '95
Star Trek con at Hilton International, Leeds. Write to: **16 Bramwell St, Eastwood, Rotherham, South Yorks S65 1RZ**

2-3 September 1995
Ne'a'driar
Star Trek con at Shepperton Moat House. Write to: **John Foxley, 143 Northumberland Rd, North Harrow, Middx HA2 7RB**

15-18 September 1995
Wolf 359 – The Gathering
Star Trek/Babylon 5 con at the Sachas Hotel, Manchester. Sold out.

22-24 September 1995
6th Festival of Fantastic Films
Society of Fantastic Films presents Manchester's yearly film fest. Write to: **95 Meadowgate Rd, Salford, Manchester M6 8EN**

6-8 October 1995
Midcon 14
Star Trek con at Holiday Inn, Leicester. Registration £33. Write to: **8 Ennerdale Close, Oadby, Leicester LE2 4TN**

14-15 October 1995
Octocon 95
Irish national con at Royal Marine Hotel, Dun Laoghaire. Registration is £16 until 1/9/95. IRC to: **30 South Circular Rd, Dublin 8, Ireland** or **e-mail mmmchugh@tcd.ie**

27-29 October 1995
Phoenix
Star Trek/media con at Apollo Hotel, Birmingham. Write to: **112 The Normans, Wexham, Slough SL2 5TU**

27-30 October 1995
Cult TV
Telefantasy weekend at Haven All-Action Centre, Great Yarmouth. Registration £39 until 31/8/95, £44 after. Write to: **PO Box 1701, Peterborough PE1 1EX**

28 October 1995
Talk by authors Stephen Baxter, Keith Brooke and Peter F Hamilton. For more info, write to: **Peterborough Museum, Priestgate, Peterborough**

3-5 November 1995
Novacon 25
Annual SF con celebrates its silver jubilee at Chamberlain Hotel, Birmingham. Registration £25 until 30/9/95. Write to: **Carol Morton, 14 Park St, Lye, Stourbridge, West Mids DY9 8SS**

3-5 November 1995
ReContanimeTed
Japanese anime con at Grand Hotel, Colmore Row, Birmingham. Registration £21 until 30/9/95. Write to: **M Pay, 29 Langton Ave, Chelmsford CM1 2BW**

17-19 November 1995
Armadacon VII
Multi-media SF & fantasy con at Astor Hotel, Plymouth. Registration £20. Write to: **4 Gleneagle Ave, Mannamead, Plymouth, Devon PL3 5HL**

18-19 November 1995
Assimilation
Star Trek/media con at Friendly Hotel, Milton Keynes. Registration £20. Write to: **Stuart Banks, 77 Holyrood Ave, South Harrow, Middx HA2 8UD**

2-4 February 1996
Starbase 96
Star Trek con at Hilton National, Leeds. Registration £40. Write to: **Miss C Looby, 152 Otley Rd, Headingly, Leeds LS16 5JX**

10-11 February 1996
Star Fleet Ball
Star Trek fancy dress bash at The Royal Bath, B'mth. Registration £35. Write to: **Anne Lindup, "Five Elms," Holtwood, Nr Wimborne, Dorset BH21 7DT**

29-31 March 1996
48 Hours In Space
48-hour TVSF marathon at Comfort Friendly Inn, Hull. Registration £25. Write to: **Hull Starfleet, PO Box 1701, Hull HU4 7YU**

5-8 April 1996
Evolution
47th British National SF Con (Eastercon) at Radisson Edwardian Hotel, Heathrow. Registration £24. Write to: **13 Lindfield Gardens, London NW3 6PX** or **e-mail bmh@ee.ic.ac.uk**

12-14 April 1996
Accelerate 96
Quantum Leap con at the Radisson Edwardian, Heathrow. Write to: **78 Sterry Rd, Dagenham, Essex RM10 8NT** or **e-mail Accelerate@pbayliss.demon.co.uk**

2-6 May 1996
Warp Two
41st British *Star Trek* Convention at Cardiff International Arena. Registration £35. Write to: **David Simons, Warp Two, 69 Merlin Crescent, Edgeware, Middx HA8 6JB**

24-27 May 1996
Inconsequential V
Third SF humour con at Scotch Corner Hotel, Darlington. Registration £22. Write to: **Flat 1, 31 Saxon Rd, South Norwood, London SE25 5EQ**

23-26 August 1996
Concorde
42nd British *Star Trek* Convention at the Radisson Edwardian, Heathrow. Registration £30 until 31/12/95. Write to: **Concorde Registrations,138 Crosslands, Stantonbury, Milton Keynes MK14 6DF**

26-27 October 1996
Who's 7 Strikes Back!
Doctor Who/*Blake's 7* con at Ashford International Hotel, Ashford. Registration £40 until 30/4/96. Write to: **10 Fillebrook Hall, Fillebrook Rd, Leytonstone, London E11 1AG** or **e-mail lexin@cix.compulink.co.uk.**

8-10 November 1996
Novacon 26
To be held at the Ibis Hotel, Birmingham. Registration £22 until 5/11/95. Write to: **14 Park St, Lye, Stourbridge, West Middlesex DY9 8SS**

28-31 March 1997
Intervention
Register early for the '97 Eastercon at just £20. Write to: **12 Crowsbury Close, Emsworth, Hants PO10 7TS**

30 DAYS INTO THE FUTURE...

Coming next month in SFX

SPECIAL ISSUE! THE NEW TV SEASON IN SFX

It's that time of year again – time for the US TV networks to display their wares for the new season, including a humungous number of SF-flavoured shows. Next issue, we look at what'll be happening on old favourites like *Deep Space Nine*, *Superman* and *The X-Files*, report on newies like *Space: Above and Beyond*, and take a look at all the American SF shows coming to British TV this Autumn. It's a massive 20-plus page special, and it's exclusive to next month's SFX...

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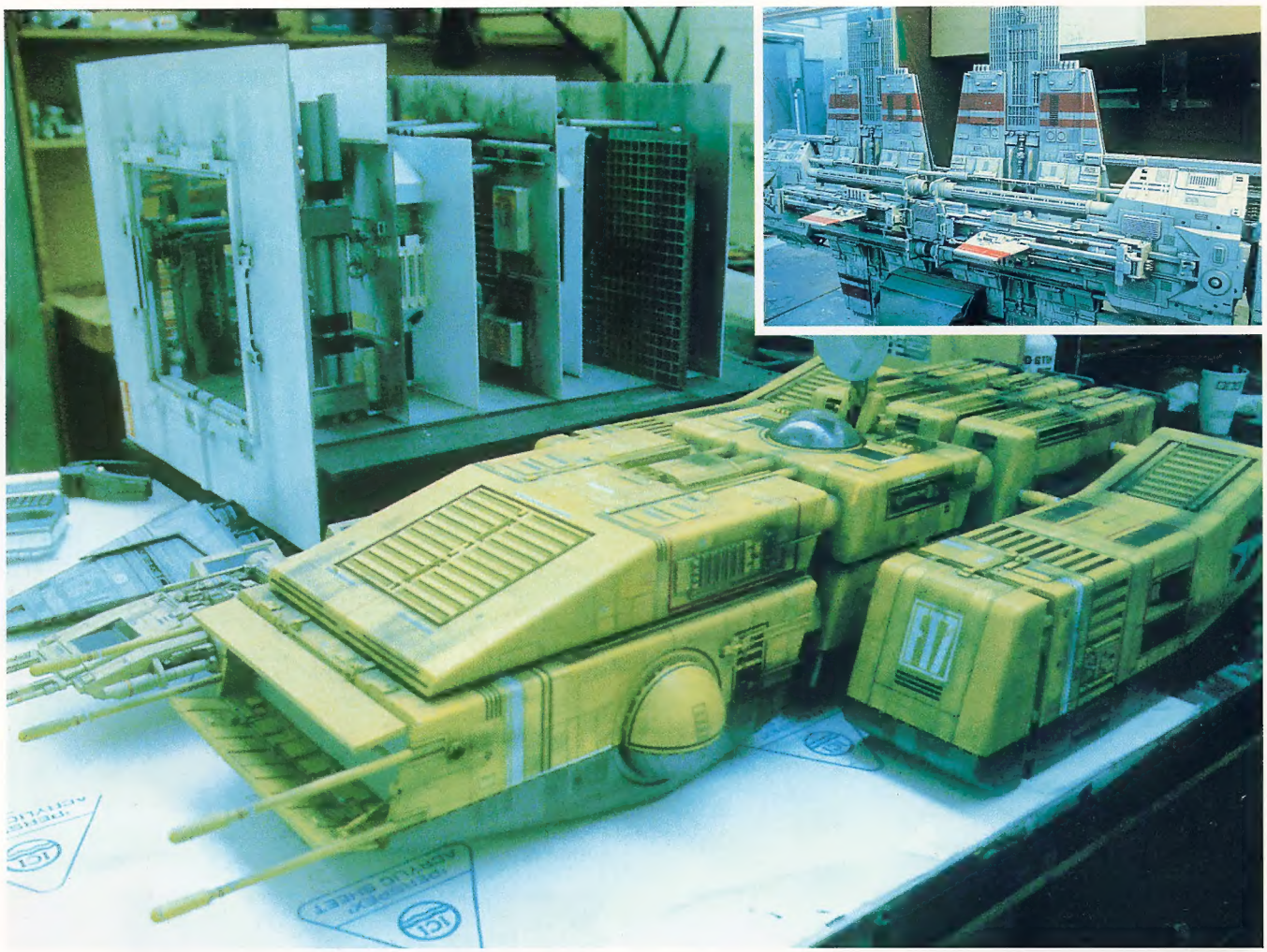
MAKE A NOTE!

BLAKE'S 7

Season four of Blake's 7 tried to dispel the myth of hairdryer spaceships and wobbly fly-bys once and for all. And looking at these models, it's a wonder it didn't succeed...



Be honest, if it didn't say *Blake's 7* at the top of the page, you'd probably have thought this lot were from a much more expensive Gerry Anderson series – maybe even a film.

But no. When senior effects designer Jim Francis embarked on season four of the show, which originally aired in 1981, he was determined to pull out all the stops. And here's the proof.

The large spaceship in the main picture is Servalan's Federation Transporter. Co-designed by Jim and his then assistant Bill Pearson who also built the thing (as he did with all the models/props shown), it "spectacularly" sank at the end of "Sand."

Bill also proudly boasts that he designed and built the gun that shot Blake dead in the final episode (see page 57).

Other ships you can see here include Roy Kinnear's transporter from "Gold," and Zuckan's spaceship from "Warlord."

The inset shot shows the Space Princess, which, after its appearance in *Blake's 7*, went on to do cameos in *Red Dwarf* (as a derelict ship) and *French and Saunders* (standing in for the Sulaco in their *Aliens* skit) before retiring to a scrapyard in North Kent. Allegedly.

Fans, take note: There'll be more models and props from the vaults of the BBC special effects department next issue.

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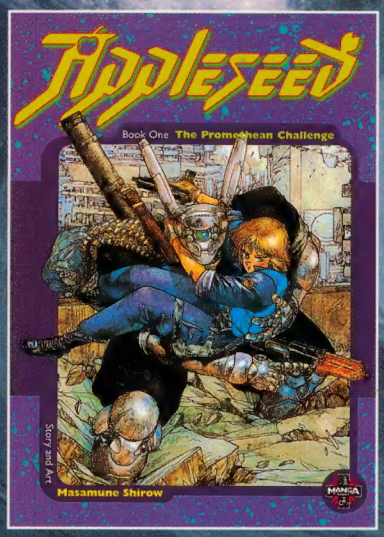

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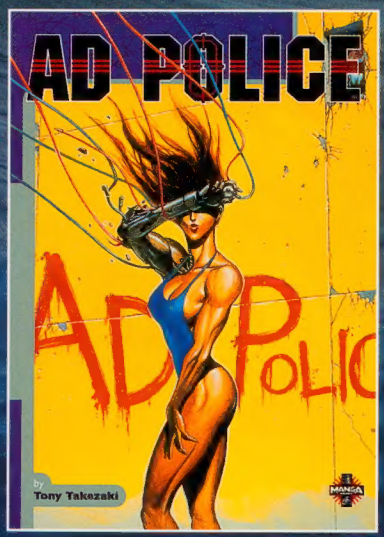

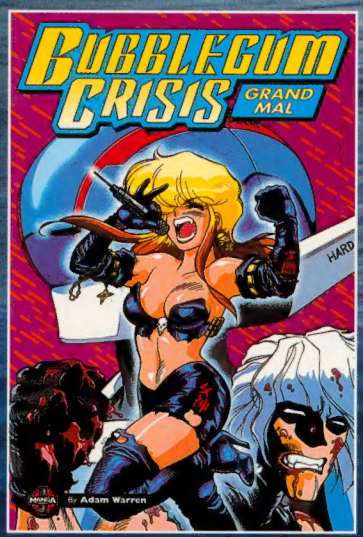

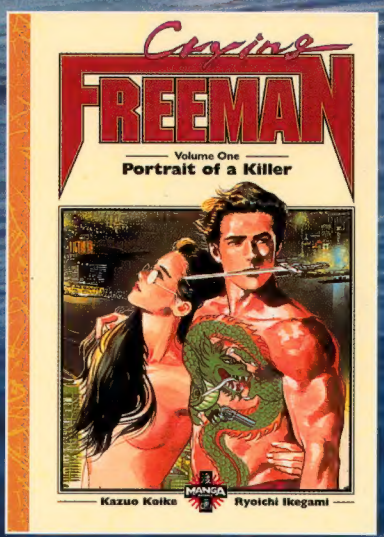

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